

A Functional Analysis of Teachers' Instructions
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RELC Journal vol. 39 no. 1 pp. 25-50. 2008

The definitive version of this article was published as Watson Todd, R., Chaiyasuk, I. and Tantisawetrat, N. (2008) A functional analysis of teachers' instructions. RELC Journal vol. 39 no. 1 pp. 25-50. doi: 10.1177/0033688208091139 It is available at <http://rel.sagepub.com/content/39/1/25.short>

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Abstract

Instructions are a key aspect of classroom discourse which have received very little attention in the literature. In this paper, we attempt to describe the functional structure of teacher instructions using the framework proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). We examine nine directing transactions or sets of instructions from four lessons taught on an English language support course at a Thai university. The directing transactions were video recorded and transcribed, and the functions identified from the teacher comments in an interview. The frequency of the various types of exchange and move in the discourse, correspondences between exchanges and moves, and pairs of exchanges and moves which co-occur significantly frequently were identified. From these, a potential structure of directing transactions is suggested. This structure starts with a boundary exchange which is followed by one or more instruction exchanges. The teacher instructions can also include insertion and inform exchanges, and usually end with a further instruction exchange.

A Functional Analysis of Teachers' Instructions

Instructions: "a series of directives, possibly mixed with explanations, questions and so on, which as a whole aim to get the students to do something" (Watson Todd, 1997: 32).

Instructions are a key aspect of classroom discourse which have unfortunately received little attention in the literature. Although it could be argued that instructions are only a means to an end in the teaching/learning process (Gower and Walters, 1983) and therefore relatively unimportant, the success of the activities which follow instructions is often predicated on the effectiveness of these instructions. This knock-on effect of instructions is often crucial to classroom learning. Furthermore, in foreign language classes, instructions may be one of the few occasions on which language is being used for meaningful communication rather than as an object to be learnt (Campbell and Kryszewska, 1995). In fact, the importance of instructions for effective teaching and learning is such that teachers may devote up to a quarter of lesson time on this aspect of classroom discourse (Boydell, 1974; Delamont, 1976 cited in Holmes, 1983). Given that instructions play such a key role in classrooms, it is surprising that so little research has been conducted in this area.

The scant literature that exists on instructions falls into two categories. Firstly, there are research articles investigating the forms that teachers and teaching assistants use to express directives (e.g. Holmes, 1983; Tapper, 1994). Secondly, the teacher training literature gives some largely unsubstantiated guidelines on how to give instructions (e.g. Parrott, 1993; Ur, 1996; Watson Todd, 1997). The pattern in the literature on instructions, then, is one where research has focused on the micro-level of directives, while the macro-level of how these directives fit together has been left to the intuitions of teacher trainers. In this paper, we intend to redress the balance by conducting a discourse analysis of teachers' instructions.

Analyses of classroom discourse

In deciding to conduct a discourse analysis of instructions in the classroom, there is a wide range of possible approaches available to us. For example, we could focus on interaction patterns in the classroom (see e.g. Long, 1983; Malamah-Thomas, 1987); we could focus on how the content or ideational elements in the discourse are organised (see e.g. Lemke, 1989; Watson Todd, 1998); we could concentrate on the

functions manifested in the discourse (see e.g. Sinclair and Brazil, 1982; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975); or we could take a more qualitative and interpretative approach (see e.g. Johnson, 1995; da Moita Lopes, 1995).

In this paper, we intend to take the third of these approaches and investigate teacher instructions from a functional perspective. In examining instructions, it seems likely that functional or interpersonal considerations will be a primary factor in the communication. Furthermore, the previous functional approaches to classroom discourse, and especially Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), have probably been the most influential of all the approaches in both discourse analysis and investigations of the classroom. For example, Sinclair and Coulthard's work has provided a model widely used in linguistics for matching forms and functions, has set up influential criteria concerning what makes a good linguistic description, and, from an educational perspective, has been related to teachers' goal structures and perceptions (Smith and Holdcraft, 1991).

The model presented by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) proposes that classroom discourse can be divided into a series of levels, which are, starting with the largest, lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act. It then describes the structure of the last three of these levels using an approach based in speech act theory (see Austin, 1962/1976; Searle, 1965).

It is in describing the structure of exchanges, and especially teaching exchanges, that Sinclair and Coulthard has been most influential. They argue that a typical exchange is made up of three moves: first, an initiating move (I) typically made by the teacher; second, a responding move (R) from a student; and third a feedback move (F) by the teacher. This IRF exchange pattern is identical to the IRE pattern (Initiation – response – evaluation) identified by Mehan (1979, 1985), even though the latter analysis takes an ethnographic approach. Such confirmation of the importance of IRF in classroom discourse has led to suggestions that further research in this direction is unnecessary (Cazden, 1986, but cf. Nassaji and Wells, 2000).

For other aspects of classroom discourse, however, Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis has been less successful. They provisionally identified three major transaction types in classroom discourse, namely, eliciting, informing, and directing, which correspond to the pedagogic terms, question-and-answer sessions, explanations, and instructions. The influential IRF pattern discussed above can be found in eliciting

transactions, but for the other two types of transaction, especially where they involve lengthy teacher utterances, Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis has little to say. Concerning directing transactions, for example, they only state that the first exchange is a boundary exchange which is followed by a T-Direct or instruction exchange.

The lack of any useful analysis of informing transactions in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) led Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) to attempt a follow-up study focusing on teacher monologues which serve to provide explanations. Moreover, although not working within the same framework as Sinclair and Coulthard, there have been several other attempts to describe the functional structure of teacher explanations (e.g. Baker, 1990; Faerch, 1986; Yee and Wagner, 1984, described in Chaudron, 1988).

For directing transactions or instructions, on the other hand, no follow-up studies have been conducted. Since Sinclair and Coulthard largely overlook this type of transaction in their analysis, the lack of research attempting to fill this gap in the literature is surprising. Given the impact that Sinclair and Coulthard's approach has had and its lack of any attempt to analyse directing transactions, having decided to investigate instructions, we decided to use a functional approach based on Sinclair and Coulthard's work.

Methodology

Overview

Even working within Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) framework, we still have some choices. One possibility is to follow the original analysis as closely as possible. A second option is to start from other approaches operating in the same framework. The main approach in this second option is that of Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) mentioned above, which may be applicable to this study since the explanations which they investigate and the instructions focused on in this study have similar high levels of teacher control.

In their analysis of teacher informing transactions, Coulthard and Montgomery used different terms and methods of identifying the various levels of discourse from those used by Sinclair and Coulthard. While their largest unit, *transactions*, is the same, Coulthard and Montgomery's next level down, *sequence* (equivalent to exchange), is identified conceptually as a smaller-scale topic-unit, and their lowest level, *member* (equivalent to move) is a syntactic unit similar to a T-unit. Coulthard and Montgomery do not conduct an analysis of discourse at the level of act.

Their work, then, provides alternative bases for identifying the different levels of discourse in addition to the purely functional approach of Sinclair and Coulthard, and suggests that we need to focus our attention at the levels of exchange and move.

To conduct a largely functional analysis of instructions, we will need to collect a corpus of classroom data with some participants' perceptions on the functions performed, identify the directing transactions in the corpus, identify and classify the exchanges and moves in these transactions, and search for relationships and patterns within these levels of discourse.

Situation and subjects

The classroom data in this study comes from an English support course for undergraduate students of science and engineering at a respected Thai university. The course was chosen as it is organised around large-scale tasks, such as library searches, Internet projects and surveys (see Pichaipattanasopon, 2001 for details) where instructions for the tasks are likely to be given a high priority in teaching.

The data was collected from four classes with four different teachers. All of the students were Thai. The teachers were all experienced male native speakers of English.

Data collection

One whole lesson per teacher was video recorded. Lessons were chosen by the teachers as ones where instructions would be emphasised. Recordings were made in a high technology classroom where hidden cameras reduced levels of intrusiveness.

After each lesson, the videos were watched and directing transactions identified (see below). A total of 9 directing transactions totaling 1,373 words were identified in the four lessons. As soon as was feasible and not later than the day after the recording, each teacher was interviewed. The model used for the interview was to play back the video recording of the directing transaction, pause the video at points where a change in the direction of the discourse appeared to occur, and ask the teachers for their intentions at those points (cf. Nunan, 1990; Wallace, 1998). The interviews, therefore, were retrospective but guided by the recordings of the lessons. The interview data was used to identify the functions in the discourse.

The directing transactions were transcribed following the conventions of Allwright and Bailey (1991) and van Lier (1988), and the teacher

comments from the interviews appended to the transcriptions. A short directing transaction with teacher comments and analysis is given in the appendix.

Identifying directing transactions

The first stage in our analysis is to identify those points in the lessons at which the teacher is giving instructions. To do this, we need to be able to divide the discourse into transactions, and then distinguish directing transactions from eliciting and informing transactions.

Transactions can be identified from their boundaries. They start with a *boundary* exchange, consisting of a framing move (e.g. 'OK' spoken with a high falling intonation and followed by a pause) and an optional focusing move which includes a forward-looking focus (Coulthard, 1981; Sinclair and Brazil, 1982; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). The end of a transaction may be indicated by a retrospective focus or a closing-down signal (Coulthard and Montgomery, 1981).

To ensure that none of the transactions used in this study are eliciting transactions, having divided the discourse into transactions, we concentrated on those transactions where the teacher is the only speaker. These teacher monologue transactions could be either directing or informing. The following criteria were used to identify the directing transactions:

- the transaction aims to get the students to do something;
- key phrases, such as 'I want you to ...', are included in the transaction;
- key words, such as 'instructions', are included in the teacher's comments in the interview;
- the transaction is followed by student activity.

It should be noted that, unlike Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), the ensuing student activity and feedback on the activity are not included in the directing transaction.

Identifying and classifying exchanges

An exchange has been defined as the "minimum unit of interaction and comprising one or more moves" (Sinclair and Brazil, 1982: 53). A problem with this definition, as with most work within Sinclair and Coulthard's framework, is that it focuses on exchanges in eliciting transactions. For directing transactions where the teacher is the only speaker, how to identify units of interaction is unclear.

We therefore decided to turn to two less functionally-oriented characteristics of exchanges to use as criteria for identification. Firstly,

exchanges contain information in only one plane (Sinclair and Brazil, 1982). A plane refers to a classroom organising system, such as language content, subject matter content, classroom organisational management, and discipline. A plane change between these organising systems would indicate a boundary between exchanges.

Secondly, exchanges contain one concept or idea (Coulthard and Brazil, 1981). Points at which new ideas are introduced into the discourse would indicate new exchanges.

Following these criteria, identifying exchanges within the directing transactions is relatively unproblematic. Having identified exchanges, we need to classify them. One type of exchange, the *boundary* exchange, was taken from Sinclair and Brazil (1982) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), but we needed to create new categories for the other exchanges in the discourse. These were set up through a recursive process of classification, and the four categories of exchanges identified in the directing transactions together with characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Types of exchange in directing transactions

Type of exchange	Characteristics of the exchange type	Realization taken from the data
1. <i>Boundary</i>	Realised by an exchange in which the teacher presents a signal for the start of a new transaction. Boundary exchanges usually include frame and focus.	//OK. Never mind right now what a concordance is. I'm going to explain a concordance later.//
2. <i>Instruction</i>	Refers to any exchange indicating that the whole class is required to do something, which can be performed at the same or different period of time.	//And you gonna have a big report together and do a big poster and give me a big oral report on this.//
3. <i>Inform</i>	Realised by an exchange in which the teacher provides information to the class related to the lesson. The information may be transferred to the class by the teacher verbally or non-verbally e.g. using visual aids.	//Filler is the information that is not related to the main idea, just the extra information not necessary or not related to main idea.//
4. <i>Insertion</i>	Realised by an exchange in which the teacher introduces mostly off-topic information e.g. jokes, discipline, rhetorical questions, or other pieces of information interrupting the main flow of the discourse.	//Come on, Sutee. Bring a chair. Come and sit over here. [Teacher looks at some sheets on the table] Take some [Sutee gets a sheet] [Sutee's phone rings] [Teacher laughs] Nothing like coming late and disturbing the class. So where was I?//

Identifying and classifying moves

A move refers to the smallest free unit or unit which can stand by itself in discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). As such, moves as discourse units are likely to coincide with syntactically defined T-units (see Barnwell, 1988; Foster et al., 2000; Fries, 1994), although single T-unit complex sentences may consist of two moves.

Having divided the discourse into moves, as with exchanges, categories of moves were identified recursively, and these are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Types of move in directing transactions

Kinds of move	Characteristics of the move type	Realization taken from the data
1. <i>Frame</i>	Realise as a closed class pronounced in proclaiming tone and followed by a measured pause.	//OK,//
2. <i>Focus</i>	Realised as a set of sentences indicating a teaching unit and which may include a time expression.	//Never mind right now what a concordance is. I'm going to explain a concordance later.//
3. <i>Direct</i>	Realised by the teacher requesting either the whole class or a particular group of students to do some activity.	//I want you to look at these//
4. <i>Opening</i>	Realised by a move indicating that the first set of information of a transaction is opened.	//What I have here is a form ...//[a pupil keeps talking]
5. <i>Counting</i>	Realised by a move in which the teacher counts.	//...3, 4, ...6 ...//
6. <i>Recall given information</i>	Realised by the teacher reproducing an utterance(s) previously uttered.	What I have here is a form ...[a group of students talking] ...//What I have here is a form ... similar to your portfolio.//
7. <i>Transfer knowledge</i>	Realised by the teacher providing new information to the discourse.	//And it has some mistakes on it. It has some grammar mistakes. The mistakes are circled.//
8. <i>Give moral support</i>	Realised by the teacher giving encouragement to the students.	//Good Luck on your exam. I hope everyone gets an A, at least B+.//
9. <i>Complaint</i>	Realised by the teacher complaining about classroom discipline, activities, or any other aspect which may or may not be relevant to the lesson.	//...[Sutee's phone rings] [T laughs] ...nothing like coming late and disturbing the class.//
10. <i>Organise the class</i>	Realised by the teacher organising group work prior to an activity.	//You could work with your partner if you want.//
11. <i>Filler</i>	Realised by a move making the main discourse delayed or paused.	[T looks at the back of the room] //So where was I?//

Data analysis

After identifying and classifying the exchanges and moves in the directing transactions, the first stage in identifying the functional organisation of instructions is to see the frequency of occurrence of the

various types of exchange and move. We can also see what types of move each type of exchange consists of, and conversely, what types of exchange each type of move can be found in.

While knowing the frequency of and matches between the different types of exchange and move provides a useful foundation, to be able to describe the functional organisation of teacher instructions, we will need to identify frequent or salient patterns of succeeding exchanges or moves. The most influential finding of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), within whose framework we are working, is the frequently occurring IRF pattern of moves in teaching exchanges. In this study, our goal is to identify similar patterns in directing transactions.

To identify such patterns, we will need to be able to identify types of exchange or move which co-occur more frequently than might be expected. A neutral expectation is that each succeeding exchange or move occurs at the frequency of the overall proportion of that type of exchange or move in the whole corpus of directing transactions. In other words, we can compare the patterns observed in the data with expected proportional patterns. To do this, we can use chi-square. For those points at which the chi-square value is significant, we can compare the observed and expected frequencies, and for those types of exchange or move for which these two frequencies are markedly different, we can draw conclusions about likely or unlikely patterns of succeeding types of exchange or move in teacher instructions.

Results

Frequencies of types of exchange and move

The first stage in our analysis is to look at the frequencies of occurrence of the various types of exchange and move to identify which functions are present and in what proportions in directing transaction. The frequencies are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3 Frequencies of types of exchange

Exchange	Frequencies	%
<i>Instruction</i>	42	40
<i>Insertion</i>	32	30
<i>Inform</i>	23	22
<i>Boundary</i>	9	8
Total	106	100

As might be expected given that we are examining 9 transactions, there are 9 *boundary* exchanges. The other types of exchange all appear relatively frequently in the data.

Table 4 Frequencies of types of move

Move	Frequencies	%
<i>Direct</i>	92	49
<i>Transfer knowledge</i>	45	24
<i>Filler</i>	13	7
<i>Complaint</i>	10	5
<i>Frame</i>	8	4
<i>Recall given information</i>	6	3
<i>Focus</i>	5	3
<i>Organise the class</i>	3	2
<i>Give moral support</i>	2	1
<i>Opening</i>	1	1
<i>Counting</i>	1	1
Total	186	100

From Table 4, we can see that most types of move occur relatively infrequently. However, as we might expect in instructions where the teacher aims to get the students to do something, *direct* moves are the most frequent.

Relationships between exchanges and moves

To see how the functions at the different levels of the discourse hierarchy are related to each other, we need to examine the types of move which comprise each type of exchange. Doing this allows us to gain insights into both the elements of exchanges and the environments in which the different types of move are likely to occur. Table 5 shows the types of move found in each type of exchange, and Table 6 shows the environments within which each type of move occurs.

Table 5 The moves comprising each type of exchange

Exchange	Move	Frequency
<i>Boundary</i> (total = 9)	- <i>frame</i>	8
	- <i>focus</i>	5
	- <i>transfer knowledge</i>	2
<i>Inform</i> (total = 23)	- <i>transfer knowledge</i>	33
	- <i>recall given information</i>	3
	- <i>opening</i>	1

<i>Instruction</i> (total = 42)	- <i>direct</i>	75
	- <i>recall given information</i>	3
	- <i>organise the class</i>	3
	- <i>transfer knowledge</i>	3
	- <i>filler</i>	1
<i>Insertion</i> (total = 32)	- <i>direct</i>	17
	- <i>filler</i>	12
	- <i>complaint</i>	10
	- <i>transfer knowledge</i>	7
	- <i>give moral support</i>	2
	- <i>counting</i>	1

Table 5 confirms the findings of Sinclair and Brazil (1982) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) concerning the *frame* and *focus* moves comprising *boundary* exchanges. We can also see that *transfer knowledge* and *direct* are by far the most frequent types of move in *inform* and *instruction* exchanges respectively. *Insertion* exchanges, on the other hand, can include a wide range of types of move.

Table 6 The environments of each type of move

Move	Exchange	Frequency
<i>Direct</i>	- <i>instruction</i>	38
	- <i>insertion</i>	10
<i>Transfer knowledge</i>	- <i>inform</i>	19
	- <i>insertion</i>	7
	- <i>instruction</i>	2
	- <i>boundary</i>	1
<i>Filler</i>	- <i>insertion</i>	12
	- <i>instruction</i>	1
<i>Complaint</i>	- <i>insertion</i>	7
<i>Frame</i>	- <i>boundary</i>	8
<i>Recall given information</i>	- <i>inform</i>	3
	- <i>instruction</i>	2
<i>Focus</i>	- <i>boundary</i>	4
<i>Organise the class</i>	- <i>instruction</i>	3
<i>Give moral support</i>	- <i>insertion</i>	1
<i>Opening</i>	- <i>inform</i>	1
<i>Counting</i>	- <i>insertion</i>	1

From Table 6, we can see that *frame* and *focus* moves are only found in *boundary* exchanges, that *direct* moves are most likely to appear in *instruction* exchanges, *transfer knowledge* moves in *inform* exchanges, and *complaint* and *filler* moves in *insertion* exchanges.

Patterns of exchanges and moves

Having seen the relationships between the functions of exchanges and moves, we can turn to investigating whether these functions form patterns of succeeding exchanges and moves. We can do this by comparing observed and expected frequencies of types of exchange and move within a given environment. Applying chi-square, Tables 7 and 8 show the

extent to which observed frequencies of pairs of functions match expected frequencies for exchanges and moves respectively.

Table 7 Significant pairs of exchanges

Exchanges	Preceding		Succeeding	
	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
<i>Boundary</i>	0.00	n.s.	5.48	n.s.
<i>Instruction</i>	9.96	$p < 0.05$ (1)	12.68	$p < 0.01$ (3)
<i>Inform</i>	3.23	n.s.	5.37	n.s.
<i>Insertion</i>	17.04	$p < 0.01$ (2)	17.20	$p < 0.01$ (4)

Note: Numbers in brackets refer to Table 9

Table 8 Significant pairs of moves

Moves	Preceding		Succeeding	
	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
<i>Direct</i>	18.95	n.s.	32.50	$p < 0.01$ (4)
<i>Transfer knowledge</i>	23.31	$p < 0.01$ (1)	20.13	$p < 0.05$ (5)
<i>Filler</i>	32.10	$p < 0.01$ (2)	33.34	$p < 0.01$ (6)
<i>Complaint</i>	39.80	$p < 0.01$ (3)	68.33	$p < 0.01$ (7)
<i>Frame</i>	0.00	n.s.	75.40	$p < 0.01$ (8)
<i>Recall given information</i>	6.00	n.s.	24.02	$p < 0.01$
<i>Focus</i>	64.73	$p < 0.01$	11.26	n.s.
<i>Organise the class</i>	31.48	$p < 0.01$	1.91	n.s.
<i>Give moral support</i>	49.70	$p < 0.01$	49.91	$p < 0.01$
<i>Opening</i>	0.91	n.s.	0.92	n.s.
<i>Counting</i>	32.27	$p < 0.01$	0.92	n.s.

Note: Numbers in brackets refer to Table 10. Moves with an overall frequency of 6 or less are ignored in further analysis.

The points which are found to be non-significant are those where the preceding or succeeding exchanges or moves are found in proportion to their overall frequency in the data. For those points where there is a significant probability, we need to look more closely at the cause. At these points, some functions precede or succeed the given exchange or move more frequently than expected, while others occur less frequently. To identify patterns of functions, we need to identify which types of exchange or move occur more or less frequently than expected. These can be identified by comparing the observed and expected frequencies for those points at which the chi-square value is significant. For pairs of functions where the observed frequency is much greater than the expected frequency, we can say that there is a relatively high probability of such pairs of functions forming patterns in instructions. On the other hand, where expected frequencies exceed observed frequencies, there is a low probability of such pairs of functions occurring. Tables 9 and 10 show the

pairs of exchanges and moves which have high and low probabilities of forming patterns in directing transactions.

Table 9 Probabilities of occurrence of pairs of exchanges

Sequence	Kinds of exchange	High	Low
Preceding	(1) <i>Instruction</i>	- <i>Instruction</i> - <i>Boundary</i>	- <i>Insertion</i>
	(2) <i>Insertion</i>	- <i>Insertion</i>	- <i>Instruction</i>
Succeeding	(3) <i>Instruction</i>	- <i>Instruction</i>	- <i>Boundary</i> - <i>Insertion</i>
	(4) <i>Insertion</i>	- <i>Insertion</i>	- <i>Boundary</i> - <i>Instruction</i>

Table 10 Probabilities of occurrence of pairs of moves

Sequence	Kinds of Move	High	Low
Preceding	(1) <i>Transfer knowledge</i>	- <i>Transfer knowledge</i> - <i>Filler</i>	- <i>Direct</i>
	(2) <i>Filler</i>	- <i>Filler</i> - <i>Transfer knowledge</i>	- <i>Direct</i>
	(3) <i>Complaint</i>	- <i>Complaint</i>	- <i>Transfer knowledge</i> - <i>Direct</i>
Succeeding	(4) <i>Direct</i>	- <i>Direct</i> - <i>Recall given information</i>	- <i>Filler</i> - <i>Transfer knowledge</i>
	(5) <i>Transfer knowledge</i>	- <i>Transfer knowledge</i> - <i>Filler</i>	- <i>Frame</i> - <i>Direct</i>
	(6) <i>Filler</i>	- <i>Filler</i> - <i>Transfer knowledge</i>	- <i>Direct</i>
	(7) <i>Complaint</i>	- <i>Complaint</i> - <i>Filler</i>	- <i>Transfer knowledge</i> - <i>Direct</i>
	(8) <i>Frame</i>	- <i>Focus</i> - <i>Organise the class</i>	- <i>Transfer knowledge</i> - <i>Direct</i>

From Table 9, we can see the patterns of exchanges which are likely to occur in directing transactions. We can represent these diagrammatically as in Figure 1, where pairs of exchanges with high probabilities of co-occurring are indicated by normal arrows, and pairs with neither high or low probabilities are indicated by dotted arrows.

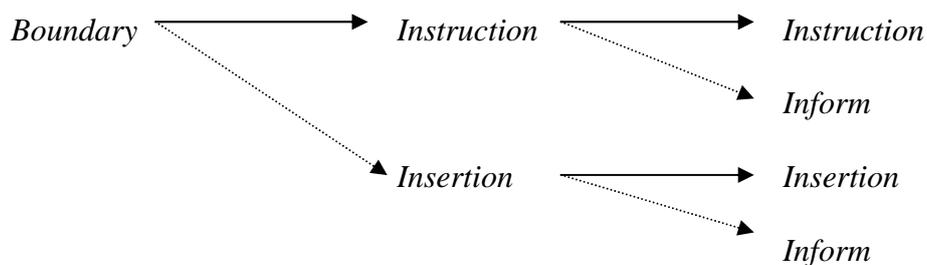


Figure 1 Patterns of exchanges in teacher instructions

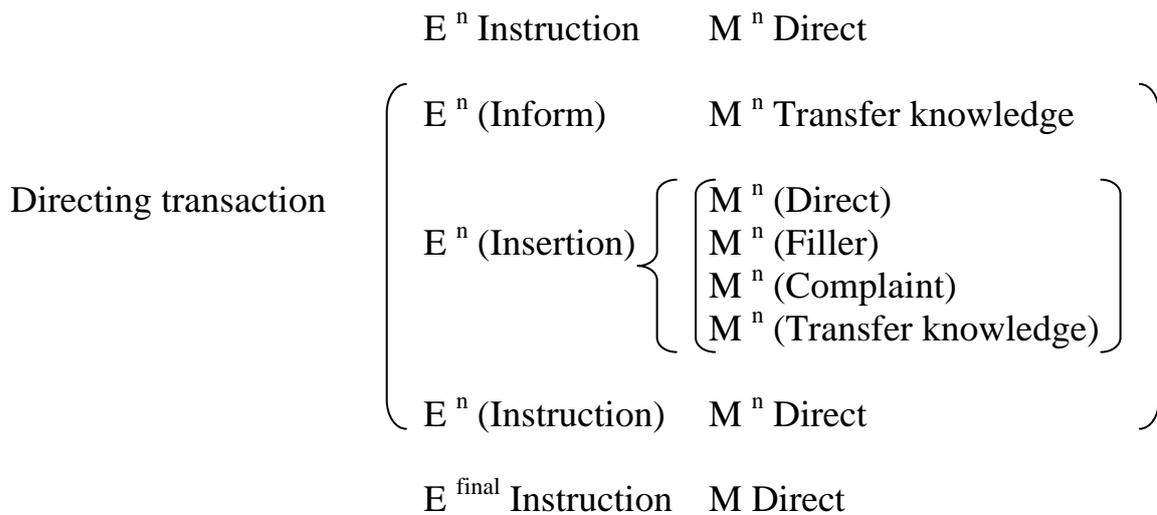


Figure 3 Summary of the structure of teacher instructions

Conclusion

While the structure of teacher instructions shown in Figure 3 appears potentially useful, the generalisability of the patterns identified is unclear. The patterns may be specific to English as a Foreign Language teaching situations, may be heavily influenced by the ensuing task for which the instructions are being given, or may be due to idiosyncrasies of the individual teachers. Nevertheless, as a first attempt to produce a functional structure of teacher instructions, it provides a benchmark against which the instructions in other situations can be compared.

The applicability of the findings for classroom teachers is also open to doubt. In this study, we did not attempt to measure the effectiveness of the instructions. However, from the video recordings, all of the ensuing activities flowed smoothly, suggesting that the instructions investigated were clear to students, a key criterion of effective instructions (Ur, 1996). If this is the case, then we may be able to say that some of the characteristics of instructions identified in this study help to make instructions clearer. We may be able to advise teachers that, to give clear instructions, they should indicate the start of the instructions, should focus of the *instruction* exchanges and *direct* moves, should consider the inclusion of *transfer knowledge* moves, and should end with an *instruction* exchange.

Finally, this study assumes that the functions of instructions are of key importance. The relationship between the functions and the content of teacher instructions is, however, unclear. It may be the case that content issues (such as the eight potential areas to include in instructions

suggested by Watson Todd (1997)) may play a more important role than functions in the effectiveness of instructions. While further work on the content of instructions is needed, we hope that this paper provides a firm foundation for functional analyses of teacher instructions.

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Appendix An analysed directing transaction

Teacher talk	Teacher's comments	Exchange	Move
T: Well,	I mention about the exam because	Boundary	Frame
I know that you have an exam.	some students came to see me before the lesson began that they would have	Inform	Transfer knowledge
I'll let you go early. [some students act as if they are leaving right away]	an exam by 10:30 a.m. so I want them to know that I know what they are to do after this class. I also want to draw attention to this lesson first. They will	Inform	Transfer knowledge
Not yet, not yet.	not worry too much about the time. And I just to remind them that I'll let	Insertion	Direct
But I'll let you go early.	them go early to prepare for the exam. And I don't want them to leave right away. They have to study first.	Inform	Transfer knowledge
What I would like you to do is get in groups, your groups for the project.	I want them to do at least some activity before they leave. The important thing for their project is preparing visual aids. I want them	Instruction	Direct
Talk about what kind of visual aids you can use, what information would you put, would you present, show with that visual aid.	to discuss this in their groups for about 15-20 minutes before I let them go. Some time I repeat myself using different words to show that's the examples of some part of activity that they have to do before they leave.		Direct
Let's do that for about fifteen minutes, fifteen, twenty minutes	I hope by saying this will motivate them in helping each other to do the	Instruction	Direct
and I'll let you go	activity. I also want to confirm that after the time given, I'll let them go for sure.	Inform	Recalling given information