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Teachers' Answers to Students' Questions: Problematizing the Issue of Making Meaning

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This paper analyzes how three university ESL teachers answered students' requests for help in understanding unknown vocabulary items during lessons that were mediated via a task-based, small group methodology. While considerable individual variation was observed, it was found that teachers rarely answered students' questions directly. Instead, they tended to answer learners' referential questions with display questions of their own, a strategy that is called here a counter-question strategy. It is argued that the use of this strategy for making meaning problematizes issues in the second language acquisition literature on the social construction of comprehensible input and output. Alternative interpretations of the implications of this meaning-making strategy for second language acquisition theory are offered as a basis for further research.

INTRODUCTION

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, second language classroom research (SLCR) typically consisted of large-scale studies which sought to compare the relative efficacy of various "methods" of language teaching (see Chastain 1969; Levin, 1972; Scherer & Wertheimer, 1964; Smith, 1970). These early studies failed to establish that any one method was superior to any other. This lack of empirical support for any of the methods that were then current had several important consequences for both SLCR and language pedagogy.

First, the null findings of these studies further eroded the legitimacy of audiolingualism, whose theoretical foundations had already been severely shaken by the Chomskyan revolution in theoretical linguistics. Second, they contributed to the subsequent critique of the prescriptive notion of "method" as a useful construct for either SLCR or teacher education (see Allwright, 1983; Brumfit, 1991; Long, 1989, 1991; Pennycook, 1988; Swaffar, Arens & Morgan, 1982). And third, the inadequacies of the research designs of these studies, which failed to include an observational component to check whether teachers were actually using the "method" they were supposed to be using with their classes, led to the emergence of so-called "process-product" research (Long, 1983) as the dominant research paradigm in SLCR.

Briefly, a great deal of current SLCR is theoretically motivated by the belief that, in order for second language acquisition (SLA) to be possible, learners must obtain input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence (Krashen, 1980). This input is thought to become comprehensible (and thus available for learning) through the mechanism of modified interaction, which entails the use of certain conversational features such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks (Long, 1980). In turn, by modifying their interaction, learners produce comprehensible output, which enables them to "move from semantic to syntactic processing" (Swain, 1985, p. 249; see also Swain, 1995).

The methodology used by most process-product researchers to date is quasi-experimental. It involves gathering empirical classroom data and attempting to demonstrate indirectly that the modification of conversational interaction causes second language development. This behavior has been investigated in the context of five broad categories of language use, which may be called "local practices" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 126).[1] Of course, as even a cursory reading of the recent SLCR literature demonstrates, these categories are not mutually exclusive and researchers regularly investigate issues which cut across categorical boundaries. Nonetheless, these categories include:

- the effects of teacher question types on student production (for example, Banbrook & Skehan, 1990; Brock, 1986; Long & Sato, 1983; White & Lightbown, 1984).
- language use in lock-step and small group work (for example, Long, Adams, McLean & Castaños, 1976; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985).
- the relationship between practice and achievement (for example, Ellis, 1984; Savignon, 1972; Spada, 1987; Swain, 1985, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, in press; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993).
- teachers' treatment of error (for example, Chaudron, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1987; Nystrom, 1983; Salica, 1981).
- the effect of task type on learner production (for example, Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 1989; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Porter, 1986; Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989 (Based on Ellis, 1990, p. 64)).

Finally, current SLCR may or may not be concerned with pedagogical application:

> The main aim of some researchers is theory construction. The classroom merely serves as a convenient setting in which to carry out empirical work. Other researchers in this tradition [for example, Long, 1985], however, are motivated by a desire to increase instructional

efficiency, believing that progress is best assured if it is research-led and
if the research is based on a strong theory ... (Ellis 1990, p. 54).

In the present paper, I offer what is in many ways a mirror image of the
kind of SLCR I have outlined above.   First, instead of investigating how
teachers *ask* questions, I consider how they *answer* students' questions in the
context of task-based instruction that is mediated via small group work.[2]   Note
in this regard that almost no research has been done in this area—and at first
glance, we may wonder why this should be so.   The explanation for this
seemingly odd lack of research on this topic is simple.   Whether we look at the
first language literature on content classrooms or the SLCR literature, it seems
that,   quantitatively-speaking,   students   rarely   ask   teachers   questions;
consequently, there are few instances of teachers' answers to analyze.   This
unequal distribution of questions is normally explained as a manifestation of the
unequal power relationships that obtain between teachers and learners in the
classroom (see later discussion).

In the first language literature, Dillon (1981) observed 27 first language
classrooms in six different high schools and found 378 instances of teachers'
questions.   In contrast, students asked a mere 95 questions.   A review by Dillon
(1988) of 12 other large scale cross-sectional studies of teacher-student
questioning behavior in US elementary, junior high and high schools carried out
between 1912 and 1986 showed very similar results.   The lack of students'
questions seems even more pronounced in the SLCR literature.   White &
Lightbown (1984) found that ESL teachers in seven Canadian high school
classes (grades 8-10) asked a total of 1387 questions while students only asked
104 questions.   As we will see, the strategies for making meaning that were
observed when students *did* ask teachers questions in the data used for this study
are also interpretable in terms of unequal power relationships.

Second, although I acknowledge the many theoretical contributions that
experimental process-product research has made to SLA studies, I use a
qualitative approach to doing process-product research that is mostly influenced
by current work in conversation/discourse analysis (see   Kasper, 1985;   Markee,
1994a;   Samuda & Rounds, 1993;   Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974;
Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977; van Lier, 1988).   The use of such a research
methodology allows us to analyze participants' turn-taking behaviors in a way
that problematizes an important theoretical issue in the SLA literature: how does
the social construction of comprehensible input and output actually affect second
language development? Given our current level of understanding of the processes
at work in second language learning, we cannot hope to give unequivocal
answers to this question.   Consequently, my more modest goal in this paper is
to analyze participants' turn-taking behaviors in the classroom and to provide
alternative interpretations of the implications of these behaviors for second
language teaching and learning.

THE STUDY: BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The data analyzed in this paper come from three lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate ESL classes that were taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) during Spring semester 1990. Classes were small (10 students in Class 1, 12 in Class 2, and 11 in Class 3). Each class lasted fifty minutes and was taught through a task-based, group work methodology. The interaction among students in each group (which ranged in size from 2 to 5 student members) was video- and audio-recorded. These recordings were subsequently transcribed, based on the transcription conventions found in Jefferson (1978) and van Lier (1988) (see Appendix 1).

All three teachers were enrolled as full-time students in the UIUC MATESL program and were employed as part-time teaching assistants in the ESL service courses, which provide English for Academic Purposes instruction for international students registered at this university. All three teachers were experienced instructors, who had at least three years of teaching experience in the United States and abroad. Two were native speakers of American English, one of British English. All claimed to be committed to using communicative language teaching and pointed to their use of group work as evidence of this. The materials used in the three classes had been developed either by the instructors themselves or by other teaching assistants in the ESL service courses.

In the lessons analyzed here, the topic of discussion in Class 1 was the greenhouse effect; in Class 2, it was the potential re-unification of Germany; and in Class 3, the theme was civil rights in the US. In each class, students read one of several thematically-related readings. They had to exchange information on the content of their respective articles and synthesize this in order to subsequently write an essay on the topic they were discussing. In Class 2, for reasons that will become clear later, it is also important to note that the class was organized into two distinct group work phases. During the first group work phase, each group of learners read the *same* article on an aspect of German reunification. During the second group work phase, the composition of the groups was changed so that each member in the newly-constituted groups had read a *different* article during the initial group work phase. Thus, group members in these newly-constituted groups had not had the opportunity to read each others' articles and had to tell their group colleagues what information was contained in their article in order to be able to complete the subsequent writing task. In other words, instruction was organized according to a classic jigsaw task design (Johnson, 1982).

The tasks analyzed in this paper are "micro-tasks," which consist of oral definitions. This communicative event may be defined as "any turn(s)-at-talk that are hearable by participants as explanations of lexical items or phrases

whose meaning is actually or potentially unclear" (Markee, 1994a, p.106). All the definitions analyzed here occur at nearly identical "decision points" (Long & Crookes, 1987); more specifically, all the definitions analyzed here involve:

- work which is initiated by learners, not teachers.
- work on problem words or phrases that are located in the source readings or in the guiding questions prepared by the teachers.
- work in which teachers are not originally group participants and are invited by learners to join their groups to help them understand problem items (with one exception).

As might be expected, the questions which learners used to initiate these micro-tasks are referential questions—that is, they are genuine requests for new information. They are not display questions—questions to which the teacher already knows the answer—as is so often the case when teachers do the asking (Long & Sato, 1983). Because the principal function of display questions is to require learners to display their knowledge of the target language to the teacher, whatever communication ensues as a result of these questions is an incidental by-product of the interaction.[3]

The seemingly obvious observation that students use referential questions has interesting implications. In teacher-fronted interaction, such questions have been shown to promote more conversational restructuring than display questions do (Brock, 1986). This is important because, as I noted earlier, current SLA theory predicts that such restructuring is necessary for language learning to occur. Learners are therefore spontaneously using a question type that is theoretically claimed to be preferable to display questions as a resource for language learning. Furthermore, since these questions are initiated by learners rather than by teachers, they illustrate a type of task-oriented discourse which is potentially quite different from that normally found in SL classrooms, in which teachers normally dominate the talk.

It is widely recognized in both the first language and SLCR literatures that teachers in "traditional" (i.e, teacher-fronted) classrooms have privileged turn-taking rights. These rights allow teachers not only to select who speaks what, to whom, and when, but also allows them to hold or take back the floor for themselves whenever they wish. These rights are evidenced in the Question-Answer-Comment ([Q][A][C]) sequential organization of "traditional" classroom talk. The turn-taking conventions which underlie this sequential organization prototypically pre-allocate the right to ask questions to teachers and the responsibility to answer questions to learners. In the final commenting turn of the sequence, teachers evaluate the adequacy of learners' answers. Finally, note that whoever does the initial [Q] turn (typically, the teacher) is also in sequential position to control the final [C] turn (see, among others, Bellack, Kliebard & Smith, 1966; Cazden, 1988; Carlsen, 1991; McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979; Mishler, 1975a, 1975b; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975 in the L1 literature. And

see Kasper, 1985; Long & Sato 1983; Nicholls, 1993; Pica, 1987; White & Lightbown 1984;   and van Lier, 1988 in the SLCR literature for further discussion of these issues). Thus, as shown in Figure 1, the sequence of turns shown in Trajectory 1 (typically found in "traditional" classrooms) and Trajectory 2 (potentially found in "non-traditional" classrooms) are identical. However, the fact that the [Q] and [C] turns are controlled by teachers in Trajectory 1 and by learners in Trajectory 2 makes these types of discourse qualitatively quite different from each other.   Indeed, the choice(s) teachers make at the decision point which follows a [Q] turn controlled by a learner effectively decide whether it is the teacher or the learners who set the moment by moment teaching/learning agenda in the classroom.
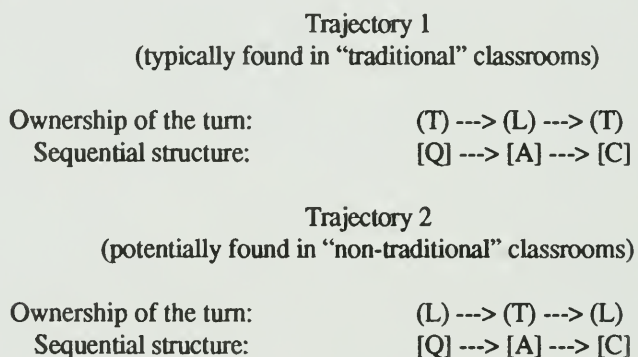
<div align="center">

Trajectory 1
(typically found in "traditional" classrooms)

</div>

Ownership of the turn: (T) ---> (L) ---> (T)
Sequential structure: [Q] ---> [A] ---> [C]

<div align="center">

Trajectory 2
(potentially found in "non-traditional" classrooms)

</div>

Ownership of the turn: (L) ---> (T) ---> (L)
Sequential structure: [Q] ---> [A] ---> [C]

Figure 1.   Two Alternative Trajectories for Classroom Talk

The data-base for this paper consists of 15 definition topics.   Learners and teachers constructed 49 definition sequences within these topics.   The range, frequency and distribution of responding strategies which the teachers in the three classes used to respond to learners' definition requests are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that, in aggregate, four important responding strategies were observed in the data (see column 1).   However, not all teachers used all of the attested strategies.   Teacher one (T1) used three strategies, teacher two (T2) used four and teacher three (T3) used two.   The raw scores shown for each class show how many times each individual teacher used each strategy to answer learners' questions.   For example, T1 responded directly to learners' questions seven times.   The raw scores given at the bottom of each column in row 6 show the total number of times that *all* strategies attested *within* a single class, by a single teacher were used.   For example, T1 responded to learners' questions 7 times.   More specifically, this means that she responded directly to learners' questions 7/16 (44%) times, did a counter-question turn constructed with a display question 6/16 (38%) times, and did a counter-question turn constructed

with a referential question 3/16 (19%) times. The raw score totals for each class in row 6 are then added up to yield a total of 47 responses across all three classes. The raw scores given in column 5 show the totals for how many times each *individual* strategy was used *across* classes. Thus, the use of a direct answering strategy was attested 10 times in the data base.

Table 1: Teacher's Response Strategies

Ts' response strategies	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Total
Answer turn	**7** 44%	**3** 13%	**0** 0%	**10** 21%
Counter-question (display)	**6** 38%	**16** 70%	**2** 25%	**24** 51%
Counter-question (Referential)	**3** 19%	**3** 13%	**0** 0%	**6** 13%
Counter-question (text-focused)	**0** 0%	**1** 4%	**6** 75%	**7** 15%
Total	**16**	**23**	**8**	**47**

Note: Percentages represent percent of total responses in this column

THE STUDY: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the responding strategies most frequently used by teachers are (in descending order of importance):

1) A counter question strategy that is constructed with a display question (henceforward, a [CQ] (D) strategy);
2) A direct answering strategy (henceforward, an [A] strategy);
3) A focusing strategy, in which the teacher directs the learner's attention to information in the source text; and
4) A counter question strategy that is constructed with a referential question (henceforward, a [CQ] (R) strategy).

For the purposes of this analysis, I will discard two other minor strategies which appeared in the data—a strategy in which the teacher directs a specific learner to answer, and a strategy which ignores the learner's question—on the grounds that there were very few instances of these in the data. If we now look at the frequency of the remaining four strategies, it is immediately striking that, although an [A] strategy is the second most frequently used strategy observed in the data, it only accounts for 21% of all the teachers' responses in the data. This trend is similar to that observed in first language content classrooms, where teachers (in teacher-fronted classrooms) answered learners' [Q] turns directly on only one third of all occasions (Mischler 1975b; raw scores are not available).

If we now analyze [A] turns in terms of their distribution, we can see that T1 accounts for the great majority of the instances when teachers used an [A] strategy. In fact, if we go back to the transcripts to examine the relevant data from a qualitative perspective, it is evident that the figures for T1's use of an [A] strategy are even more skewed than they might seem at first because five of the instances when T1 used this strategy occurred within one definition topic. The glosses in the margin of Excerpt 1 below identify the function(s) of each turn and may be read as follows: [Q1] = the first question in a sequence; [A]-[Q1] = the answer to question 1; [C]-[Q1] = the commenting turn which closes the sequence initiated by question 1.

Excerpt 1

1	L6:	[Q1]	what spur means? how do you how do you pronounce it
2			s-p-u-r
3	T:	[A]-[Q1]	spu:r
4	L6:	[C]-[Q1]	spur=

5 T:	[C]-[Q1]	=uh huh, <h>
...		
20 L6:	[Q3]	does it have another meaning too
21 T:	[A]-[Q3]	yeah you know uh on a ho:rse (+) uhm (+) when you're
22		riding (+) you have on you::r (hh) (+) on your shoe a
23		sp//ur// and you use that to:=
24 L6:		//yeah//
25 L6:	[C]-[Q3]	=ok //I understand//
26 T:	[A]-[Q3]	//make the horse// go faster <hhh>it comes from
27		//there it's// called a spu:r (+) and so the verb (1) here
28 L6:	[Q4]	//excuse me//
29 T:	[A]-[Q3]	to spur would be to encourage
30 L6:	[Q4]	so is it //a: verb// and noun too yeah=
31 L5:		//<hhh>//
32 T:	[A]-[Q4]	=yeah a spur (+) //is//
33 L6:	[C]-[Q4]	//sp//ur=
34 T:	[A]-[Q4]	=on your shoe=
35 L6:	[C]-[Q4]	=is a noun
36		(+)
37 T:	[A]-[Q4]	and to spur- it could be to spur or to spur on is to
38		encourage
39 L6:	[Q5]	so you pronounce it spur
40 T:	[A]-[Q5]	spur (+) uh //huh//
41 L6:	[C]-[Q5]	//ok//
		(Class 1, group 1)

Excerpt 1 is interesting for a number of reasons.[4] First, the [Q][A][C] structure of classroom talk is clearly observable (I will analyze the omitted sequence at lines 6-19 later; this sequence constitutes Excerpt 5). Second, it shows what can happen if teachers do *not* enforce their privileged turn-taking rights and allow the interaction to develop along the lines of Trajectory 2 shown in Figure 1. Unless they do something to take the [Q] turn away from the learner, they cannot control the moment-by-moment learning agenda that develops in the ensuing talk. Furthermore, they expose themselves to the possibility of having to answer not just one but a whole cluster of questions by the learner. More specifically, is clear that it is L6, *not the teacher*, who controls the content of the talk by controlling the sequential development of the definition work in Excerpt 1. This is because L6 owns the [Q] turns at lines 1, 20, 30 and 32. Consequently, L6 is able to lead a total of four [Q][A][C] sequences on the word "spur" in Excerpt 1 (see lines 1-4 for the first sequence, lines 20-29 for the second, lines 30-38 for the third and lines 39-41 for the fourth). And finally, this excerpt is interesting because it is the only one of its kind in the data. This suggests that the definition work shown in Excerpt 1 is

actually an artefact of the clustering phenomenon alluded to earlier. Thus, were it not for Excerpt 1, which seems to be a special case, the use of this strategy would be even rarer than it is.

Table 1 also shows that all three teachers use a "Counter-Question" strategy (Nicholls, 1993) to respond to learners' questions. That is, they counter a learner's initial [Q] turn with a [Q] turn of their own in next turn - hence the term Counter-Question ([CQ]) turn.   [CQ] turns constructed with *display* questions are the most frequently used strategy in the data (24/47 or 51% of all instances). While [CQ] turns constructed with *referential* questions are less frequent in aggregate (6/47 or 13% of all instances) and are not used at all by T3, a qualitative analysis will show that the communicative function of a [CQ] (R) strategy must be analyzed in the discoursal context of a [CQ] (D) strategy or, more rarely, in that of an [A] strategy (see Excerpts 3-8).

Finally, Table 1 shows that T3 predominantly uses a response strategy which focuses learners' attention back onto the source text. I will not discuss this strategy in any detail in this paper because, from a distributional perspective, the use of this strategy is largely an idiosyncracy of T3. However, I give an example of this strategy and a [CQ] (D) strategy in Excerpt 2 to illustrate the difference between the two strategies. The gloss in the margin of Excerpt 2 at line 8 means that L7's turn may be interpreted as a commenting turn which simultaneously functions as a second questioning turn.

Excerpt 2

```
 1  L7:  [Q1]         ok <h> and uh what is a- what is at stake I didn't
                      really
 2                    understand this question
 3  L3:               (stake)
 4  L12:              what is at stake
 5  L8:   [A]         what exactly is //the writer's position//
 6  T:                            //what is at stake//
 7                    (+)
 8  L7:  [C]/[Q2]     li::ke
 9  T:   [focus on    what would uh particularly Martin Luther King say is
                      at stake
10       source text] here in civil disobedience
11                    (+)
12  L7:               hh
13  T:   [focus on    in his pro-disobed//ience position//
   source text]
14  L7:  [Q3]                         //I don't understand// stake
15  T:                //stake//
16  L7:  [Q3]         //what does// it mean
17  T:   [CQ] (D)     who can define stake
```

18 L8:	[A]-[CQ]	stake is something that uh what's at stake wha- what are you
19		going to give up //or (++) how are you going to// get something
20 L12:	[A]-[CQ]	//what's the point//
21 T:	[C]	(what's th-) uh huh right or what is the purpose
22		...
		(Class 3, group 2)

More specifically, L7 identifies the phrase "what is at stake" as a problem item in the first [Q] turn at lines 1-2. L3 repeats part of the problem phrase at line 3 and L12 and T3 repeat the entire phrase at lines 4 and 6 respectively. T3's turn is overlapped by L8, who does a first [A] turn at line 5. L7 shows that he is still uncertain about what this phrase means in his [C] turn at line 8, which also functions as a second [Q] turn. At this point, T3 re-directs L7's attention back to the source text at lines 9-10 and 13.

Arguably, this strategy might be categorized as a variety of a [CQ] strategy; however, as we can see from the continuation of this excerpt, the [CQ] (D) sequence initiated by T3 at line 17 and closed down at line 21 is much narrower in scope than the focusing strategy T3 uses at lines 9-10 and 13. T3 seems to use a focusing strategy at lines 9-13 to get the learners to do some cognitively higher order analysis of the source text, while the [CQ] (D) strategy at lines 17-21 focuses only on eliciting the meaning of the item identified as problematic (see also the more detailed analysis of how a [CQ] strategy works that is offered for Excerpts 3-8). Consequently, I have categorized T3's strategy as a separate behavior.

It is clear from Table 1 that the three teachers behaved differently, probably reflecting different pedagogical preferences and/or local contingencies. However, whether we analyze the data in quantitative or qualitative terms, the single most important strategy of conversational control used by teachers across the board was a [CQ] strategy. Two examples of a [CQ] (D) strategy (which come from Classes 1 and 2 respectively) are shown in Excerpts 3 and 4:

Excerpt 3

1 L13:	[Q1]	... what's that mean (1) coastal vulnerability
2	[A]-[Q1]	(1)
3 L14:	[A]-[Q1]	[f]ulnerability is:
4 L13:	[Q2]	coastal vulnera- vulnerability
5 T:	[CQ1] (D)	what d'you think it means
6	[A]-[CQ1]	(1.3)
7 L14:	[A]-[CQ1]	uh?
8 T:	[CQ2] (D)	what what d'you think a- where are areas of coastal vulnerability

9			(++) <h> if you think about uh:m
10	L14:	[A]-[CQ2]	it's not safe[t] (+) areas which are not safe[t] (1) right?
11	L13:	[A]-[CQ2]	it's very easy to be:: (+) damage
12	T:	[C]-[CQ2]	yea:h (+) especially by (+) water, (+) by flooding,
13			...

(Class 1, group 4)

Excerpt 4

1	L6:	[Q1]	there is a problem here she //doesn't//
2	L15:		//(huh h)//
3	L6:		underst(h)and
4	L7:		(huh)
5	L6:	[Q1]	and we don't understand what <h>
6			//what means exactly this//
7	L15:		//why we can't get Aus[witʃ]// (+) oh
8	L6:	[Q1]	we cannot get by Ausch[v]itz
9	T:	[CQ1] (D)	ok (+) what d'you think it might mean
10	L15:		(uh huh) (+) (uh huh //h)//
11	L6:	[A]-[CQ1]	//it// might [b]ean (+) probably
12			u::h we::: (+) cannot have another Ausch[v]itz again if
13			uh Germany unites o:r maybe <hh>
14	T:	[C]/[CQ2]	does it mean that?
15			...

(Class 2, phase 2, group 2)

The effect of this strategy is to put teachers back in sequential control of the conversation. If, for example, we look at the sequential development of Excerpt 3, we can see that L13's initial [Q] turn at line 1 fails to elicit a satisfactory answer from L14 at line 3 (the trouble-relevant pause of 1 second at line 2 is analyzed as part of the [A] turn because it indicates that neither L13 nor L14 know the answer). L13 therefore does a second [Q] turn at line 4, to which T1 then responds with a [CQ] (D) turn at line 5. L14's indication of uncertainty at line 7 (which is also presaged by a trouble-indicating pause of 1.3 seconds at line 6) triggers a second, slightly modified [CQ] turn by T1 at lines 8-9. This puts L14 and L13 in the position of having to do [A] turns, which they do at lines 10 and 11 respectively. Upon completion of L14's and L13's [A] turns, T1 is in sequential position to provide an evaluative [C] turn which closes the second [CQ] sequence that she initiated at line 8. She does this [C] turn at line 12. The changes in the sequential trajectory of the talk that is promoted by a [CQ] (D) turn is shown in Figure 2:

[CQ] (D) Trajectory

Ownership of the turn:	(L) ---> (T) --->	(L)	(T)
Sequential structure:	[Q] ---> [CQ] (D) --->	[A]	[C]

Figure 2. The Effect of a [CQ] (D) Turn on the Sequential Structure of [Q][A][C] Sequences

Notice that the conversational structure of Excerpt 4 is almost identical: L6 does an initial [Q] turn at lines 1, 5 and 8; T2 regains the conversational initiative by doing a [CQ] turn at line 9, to which L6 responds with the expected [A] turn at lines 11-13. T2 then does a [C] turn at line 14 indicating that L6's response is inadequate. However, this turn also functions as a second [CQ] turn, which thus triggers more interaction. This second sequence is discussed in Excerpt 8.

In some instances, a [CQ] (R) strategy is used, as shown at line 7 of Excerpt 5 (which consists of the missing sequence from Excerpt 1) and at lines 3 and 5 of Excerpt 6:

Excerpt 5

```
5                          ...
6 L6:   [Q2]              what does this mean.
7 T:    [CQ1] (R)         can I see the sentence?  ((T looks for "spur" in the
source text))
8 L6:   [A]-[CQ1]         sure
9 T:    [C]-[CQ1]         it depends on (1) uh::m (1) where was it again down
here
10                        somewhere,
11                        (+)
12 L6:  [A]-[CQ1]         it's supposed to be here (+) uh:m (++) <hhh>
13 L5:                    (hhhhh) ((L5 laughs under his breath))
14 L6:  [A]-[CQ1]         uh::  oh, oh. (+) yeah its here
15                        (+)
16 T:   [A]-[Q2]          ok (3) to: in this case it's to encourage
17                        (+)
18 L6:  [C]-[Q2]          to en//courage//
19 T:   [C]-[Q2]                //to ((unintelligible)) (en)//courage <hh>
20                        ...
                          (Class 1, group 1)
```

Excerpt 6

1	L10:	[Q]	excuse me what is c-o-r-a-l
2			(+)
3	T:	[CQ1] (R)	can I: (+) open //(h)// <h> (++) get an idea (+) see where's
4	L10:		//(h)//
5	T:		that <h> ((T reads the source text in L10's packet of materials))
6	L10:		I don't know whether the-
7			(+)
8	T:	[CQ2] (D)	corals (+) does anyone know? (+) where you find corals?
9	L9:	[A]-[CQ2]	corals (+) u- underwater //you mean? under the-//
10	T:	[C]-[CQ2]	//uh huh,//
11			(+)
12	T:	[C]-[CQ2]	that's right yeah some-
13	L9:	[A]-[CQ2]	under the sea? in the sea
14			...

(Class 1, group 3)

Unlike a [CQ] (D) strategy, the use of a [CQ] (R) strategy by teachers does not by itself take sequential control away from learners. For example, in Excerpt 5, the [CQ] (R) sequence which T1 initiates at line 7 after L6's initial [Q2] turn at line 6 is resolved at line 14, when L6 finds the discoursal context of the word "spur" in the source reading. T1 responds to L6's original [Q2] turn at line 6 with her [A] turn at line 16. L6 and T1 then jointly construct [C] turns at lines 18 and 19 respectively. As we saw in Excerpt 1, starting from line 20, L6 is subsequently able to continue asking questions and leads a total of three more sequences which target the word "spur."

However, as shown in Excerpt 6, a [CQ] (R) strategy is more likely to be used in conjunction with a [CQ] (D) strategy than with an [A] strategy. In Excerpt 6, the same teacher again initiates a [CQ] (R) sequence at line 3 in response to L10's [Q] turn at line 1. As in Excerpt 5, T1 again looks at the discoursal context of the problem item in the source text before responding. But at line 8, T1 follows up with a second [CQ] turn; this time, she constructs her turn with a display question and thereby regains sequential control of the talk. This puts L9 in the position of doing an [A] turn, which she does at line 9 and again at line 13; T1 then evaluates the adequacy of the [A] turn at line 9 in her [C] turns at lines 10 and 12. Thus, as shown in Figure 3, whereas [CQ] (D) turns enable the person who does this turn (prototypically the teacher) to regain sequential control of the subsequent discourse, [CQ] (R) turns only set up the

possibility that the initiator of this turn will regain the sequential initiative in a subsequent turn.

Finally, the distribution of [CQ] (D) turns among participants illustrates the unequal power relationships that exist in the classroom. Learners are not allowed to act like teachers - that is, they cannot use [CQ] (D) turns in learner-teacher talk. Above all, as shown by Excerpt 7, they cannot follow a teacher's [CQ] (D) turn with a turn which teachers might interpret as a [CQ] (D) turn.

Trajectory 1

Ownership of the turn:	(Speaker A)	(Speaker B)	(Speaker A)	(Speaker B)
Sequential structure:	[Q] --->	[CQ] (R) --->	[A]-[CQ] (R) --->	l[A]-[Q] l[CQ] (D) ...

Trajectory 2

Ownership of the turn:	(L)	(T)	(L)	(T)
Sequential structure:	[Q] --->	[CQ] (D) --->	[A]-[CQ] (D) --->	[C]

Figure 3. Two alternative trajectories for definition work constructed with either [CQ] (R) or [CQ] (D) turns

Excerpt 7

```
1                           ...
2  L9    [Q]                there is this e::h (+) some sort of an idiom you
                            pretend to
3                           pay us and we pretend to work
4  T:    [C][Q1] (D)        ok. what do you think that could be: (+) do
                            you have any
5                           idea?
6  L11: [CQ] (D)            do you know what the word pretend means
7                           (++)
8  T:    [C][Q2] (D)        do I know what the word pretend means ((T
                            quickly
9                           inclines her head before speaking; she then
                            touches her
10                          chest with her right hand as she says the word
                            "I"))
```

11 L11:	[A]-[C][Q2]	yeah (+) I- I [dawt] (+) I don't know that see
12 T:	[C]/[C][Q3] (D)	oh ok who- do- does anybody know what the word pretend
13		means.
14		...

(Class 2, phase 1, group 3)

Following L9's initiating [Q] turn at lines 2-3, T2 does a [CQ] (D) turn at lines 4-5 which solicits L11 to display what he understands the word "pretend" to mean. However, L11 immediately does what, *to the teacher at least, seems to look like a [CQ] (D) turn of his own at line 6.* The best interpretation of the function of this rather puzzling turn that I can offer is that L11 is trying to tell T2 that it is *he*, not L9, who is having difficulty understanding the word "pretend." L11 and L9 have in fact already done a considerable amount of prior definition work on this item (not shown here) before L9 calls T2 over to help at lines 2-3. L9 has demonstrated in this prior work that he understands what this word means, although he finds it difficult to explain what it means in this particular context to L11. *I therefore believe that L11's turn at line 6 is actually a bungled attempt by L11 to "claim ownership" of "his" problem and that, furthermore, L11 is actually only trying to ask the teacher for more help.*

Whatever L11 may actually be trying to accomplish when he does this turn, the trouble-relevant pause at line 7 and the way T2 says the word "I" in her own [CQ] (D) turn at line 8 both strongly suggest that, rightly or wrongly, T2 interprets L6's prior turn as a [CQ] (D) turn. More specifically, the heavy stress on the word "I" (note that this suprasegmental information, which is clearly audible on the audio tape, is represented in the transcript by the use of italic script) and the teacher's body language on the videotape (see the gloss at lines 8-10) both suggest that T2 seems to interpret L11's turn as a challenge to her communicative competence as a native speaker of English and also quite possibly to her teacher's right to allocate turns as she wants. T2's [CQ] (D) turn therefore requires L11 to demonstrate in next turn that he knows that T2 knows what "pretend" means. At line 11, L11 does not immediately realize the trouble he has gotten himself into and he at first simply says "yeah." However, once he realizes that he needs to repair his previous turn at line 6, he quickly clarifies that it is *he* who does not know what the problem item means in the rest of the turn at line 11. As indicated by T2's initial change of state token "oh ok" at line 12, this answer mollifies T2; she then continues her turn at lines 12-13 with another [CQ] (D) turn constructional unit directed to the rest of the class. The sequence then progresses normally, with T2 in control of the discourse's subsequent sequential development.

On the other hand, it is allowable for learners to follow a teacher's [CQ] (D) turn with a turn that is interpretable as a [CQ] (R) turn, since such a turn does not necessarily take the conversational initiative away from the teacher. For example, the same teacher (T2) who rapped L11 on the knuckles in Excerpt 7

does not take it amiss when another learner constructs his [A] turn in response to her [CQ](D) turn as a turn that is interpretable as a [CQ] (R) turn. To see how this strategy works, let us analyze Excerpt 8, which is the continuation of Excerpt 4:

Excerpt 8

```
13                                    ...
14  T:   [C]/[CQ2]                    does it mean that?
15  L6:  [A]-[CQ2]                    I- I //[ni:]-//
16  L14: [A]-[CQ2]                    //do//es it-
17  L6:  [A]-[CQ2]                    I didn't read it
18  L14: [A]-[CQ2]/[CQ] (R)           does //it-//
19  L6:  [A]-[CQ2]                    ////I[z]-// I don't know//
20  T:   [CQ3]                        //what do you think//
21  L14: [A]-[CQ2/3]/[CQ] (R)         does it-
22  T:   [C]-[CQ2]                    oh
23  L15:                              //no//
24  L14: [A]-[CQ2/3]/[CQ] (R)         //do//es it mean that u:hm //<hh>//
25  L6:  [A]-[CQ2]                               //I didn't read it//
26  L14: [A]-[CQ2/3]/[CQ] (R)         that if the uni- if (+) the Germany
                                      unite again <h>
27                                    the Ausch[vit] might exist, <hhh>
28                                    (+)
29  T:   [C]-[A3]                     yeah. that's ba- we can't- when you
                                      can't get by
30                                    something that's <hh> you can never
                                      forget.
31  L14: [C]-[CQ2/3]                  right.
32                                    (+) ((T moves away from the group))
33                                    ...
                                      (Class 2, phase 2, group 2)
```

As we already saw in the case of T2's turn at line 14 of Excerpt 8 (see the relevant analysis of Excerpt 4), a single turn may simultaneously fulfill more than one discoursal function - in this case, this turn functions both as a [C] turn and a [CQ] (D) turn. Let us ignore L6's turns at lines 15, 17, 19 and 25. These are attempts to repair a loss of face, which are not relevant to the present analysis. In passing, notice that L6's claim at lines 15, 17, 19 and 25 that he did not read L15's article is borne out by the fact that, as shown by the seating plan shown in Figure 4, L6 and L15 had been members of Groups 1 and 4 respectively during the first phase of group work; furthermore, there is no evidence in the transcripts of inter-group cross-talk about this problematic item during the first group work phase. While we cannot be sure that students did not

"peek" at each others' articles during the second phase of group work, the transcript of the second group work phase instantiates none of the extended silent "down-time" for reading that occurs during the first group work phase. This strongly suggests that L6 and L15 did not read each others' articles. Let us now move on to analyze the structure of L14's talk at lines 16-27.
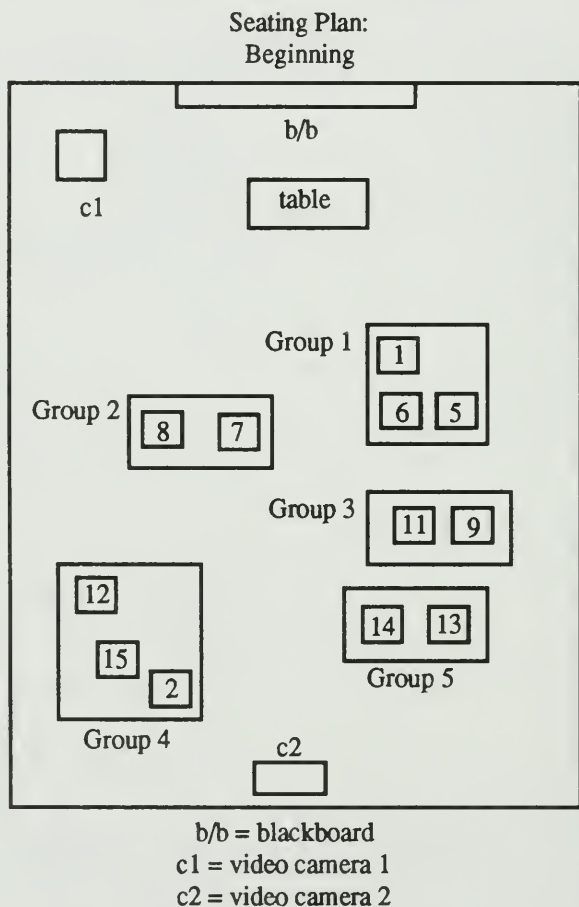
Seating Plan:
Beginning

b/b = blackboard
c1 = video camera 1
c2 = video camera 2

Figure 4.   Seating Plan of Class 2

L14 bids competitively for next turn at lines 16, 18, 21 and 24 and finally provides a definition at lines 26-27. These turns are all geared to answering T2's [CQ] (D) turns at lines 14 and 20; consequently, they may be analyzed as [A] turns. However, note that L14 also seems to construct these turns as legitimate

questions. I submit that the reason L14 does this is because L6 has just suffered a loss of face by giving an inadequate answer. Consequently, by phrasing his [A] turns as [CQ] (R) turns, L14 acknowledges in advance that his answer may be inaccurate and thereby minimizes any potential loss of face should T2 judge his answer to be inadequate. At the same time, he constructs his answer in a way that does not challenge T2's privileged turn-taking rights as a teacher. Finally, notice that, as in the case of L6, there is no textual evidence that L14 had read the original article from which the phrase "we cannot get by Auschwitz" comes: as Figure 4 shows, L14 had been a member of Group 5 during the first group work phase and there is no cross-talk between his group and L15's group during the first small group phase.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING

As I noted earlier, given what we currently know about second language learning, we cannot interpret what these behaviors actually "mean" in the larger context of SLA theory with any great certainty. Consequently, I will limit myself to providing alternative interpretations which problematize the following question:

•   how does the social construction of comprehensible input and output actually affect second language development?

There are at least three ways of interpreting the possible effects of the social construction of comprehensible input and output on second language development:

Interpretation 1

It may be argued that it is acquisitionally limiting for learners not to have the opportunity to take on the leading role in conversation (Pica, 1987). According to this view, the teachers' reliance in these data on a [Q][CQ][D][A][C] turn-taking system when they have to respond to learners' questions robs learners of the opportunity to direct the kind of modified interaction that is thought to be a necessary catalyst for second language development.

Interpretation 2

Interpretation 1 represents a *quantitative* approach to interpreting the data analyzed in the previous section. Essentially, the argument in Interpretation 1 suggests that the teachers used "too many" display questions: in order to promote

the kinds of conversational adjustments that are deemed theoretically desirable (Long & Sato, 1983; Brock, 1986), they should have used more referential questions and/or responded to learners' referential questions directly. However, from a *qualitative* standpoint, it is also possible to read several of the excerpts presented in the previous section much more positively. Indeed, I propose that these excerpts show how teachers and learners collaboratively construct conversationally - and perhaps also pedagogically - necessary definitions of problematic items. That is, from a learners' perspective, definition talk is primarily a response to a locally-occasioned communication problem, which may or may not serve as a catalyst for SLA to occur. But from a teachers' perspective, this communication problem presents a pedagogical opportunity for the teacher-as-expert to play a classic "scaffolding" role in the interaction (Hawkins, 1988), thereby possibly providing comprehensible input to learners (see Interpretation 3). For example, despite the fact that participants orient to a [Q][CQ](D)[A][C] turn-taking system during the construction of Excerpts 6 and 4/8 (recall that Excerpt 8 is the continuation of Excerpt 4), it seems that the groups are nonetheless able to construct public definitions of the problematic items that appear to be conversationally adequate. Furthermore, notice that the learners themselves have contributed actively to formulating these definitions. This minimally suggests that we still know very little about the potential effects of different conversational turn-taking practices on SLA. In any case, it is certainly not the case that the only form of language that is potentially acquisitionally useful is "communicative" talk - which, for present purposes, means talk that is organized according to the conventions and practices of equal power discourse.

Interpretation 3

While attractive, Interpretation 2 raises a number of important methodological issues. In order for Interpretation 2 to be viable, we need to be able to show that the definition work which participants engage in actually enables learners to continue productively with their work. This means that we need to contextualize the talk in Excerpts 1-8 in the larger discourses of each group and class to show what the *consequences for language learning* of the teachers' interventions are. Clearly, it is beyond the scope of the present paper to present all the relevant data and analyze them in the detail that is required to demonstrate what the learning consequences of these excerpts were. However, some preliminary work that speaks to the issue of learning consequences has already been done, whose results I will now summarize.

Markee (1994a) has shown that definition sequences can indeed sometimes serve as acquisitionally useful resources not only for local *understanding* of unknown words and phrases but also for *learning* the meanings of problematic items - in this case, a learner (L10) understanding and learning what the word "coral" means (see Excerpt 6, which is a shortened version of one of eight coral-

related excerpts discussed in Markee, 1994a). As shown in Excerpt 9 (which is actually L10's fifth sequential attempt to understand this word), L10 used the following strategies to understand the word "coral." She used her knowledge of the world to interpret the information she received from her conversational partners during small group work and made informed guesses about the meanings of this problematic item. Following L9's input at line 23, L10 volunteers new information about the color and beauty of "coral" at line 25 and also correctly translates this word into Chinese at lines 32 and 35; she then translates the Chinese word [sanku] back into English for a non-Chinese speaking interlocutor at line 38.

Excerpt 9

```
1  L10:        both of them what they say
2              (1.3)
3 L10:         coral. what is corals
4              (4)
5 L9: <hh> do you know the under the sea, under the sea,
6 L10:         un-
7 L9:  there's uh:: (+) //how do we call it//
8 L10:                        //have uh some coral//
9 L9: ah yeah (+) coral sometimes
10             (+)
11 L10:        eh includ[™]s (+) uh includes some uh: somethings uh-
12             (++)
13 L10:        //the corals,// is means uh: (+) s somethings at bottom of
14 L9:         //((unintelligible))//
15 L10:        //the// sea
16 L9:         //yeah,//
17 L9:         at the bottom of the sea,
18 L10:        ok uh:m also is a food for is a food for fish uh and uh
19             (+)
20 L9:         food?
21             (+)
22 L10:        foo-
23 L9:         no it is not a food it is like a stone you know?
24 L10:        oh I see I see I see I see I see I know I know (+) I see (+) a
25             whi- (+) a kind of a (+) white stone <h> //very beautiful//
26 L9:                                                //yeah yeah//
              very
27             big yeah //sometimes very beautiful and// sometimes when
28 L10:                  //I see I see I ok//
29 L9:         the ship moves ship tries ((unintelligible)) I think it was the
30             ((unintelligible; the final part of this turn is overlapped by
```

```
31                L10's next turn as shown by // //))
32 L10:           //oh I see (+) I see the Chinese is uh (+)// [sanku]
33                (++)
34 L11:           uh?
35 L10:           [sanku]
36                (+)
37 L9:            what
38 L10:           c//orals//
39 L11:            //corals//
40 L9:            corals oh okay
41 L10:           yeah
                  (Class 1, group 3)
```

While this evidence conclusively shows that L10 has understood what "coral" means, it does not necessarily mean that she has learned this word. However, independent textual evidence suggests that L10 has achieved much more than local understanding of this word. The teacher instructs L10 during some group work that precedes Excerpt 9 to define this word for the rest of the class, which L10 does some twenty minutes later. L10's public definition which she produces for the benefit of the whole class - "I think the co[l]al is the kind of fossil (+) <h> fossil at the: botto of the sea. <hh> the: co[l]al reef you are one of the imp- very important, <hh> habitats (+) fo:r fish that support th[ᵀᴹ]:m" - may look "messy" - but in fact it displays the classic "An A is a B which does C" structure of prototypical formal definitions (Abelson, 1967), where A = "coral", B = "fossil at the bottom of the sea" and C = "habitats for fish."

Furthermore, notice that L10 constructs this formal definition by "cannibalizing" linguistic material from previous talk. The transcripts show that the linguistic material in L10's public definition that is highlighted in bold consists of words and complete phrases that L10 has lifted verbatim from previous talk - thus, for example, one of the sources for the phrase "at the bottom of the sea" in this public definition is the talk reproduced at lines 13, 15 and 17 of Excerpt 9 in this paper.

Interestingly, with the exception of the word "fossil," which was generated during student-student talk between L10 and L9, all of the cannibalized linguistic material which L10 uses to construct her formal definition of "coral" was generated during teacher-student talk that is organized along [Q][CQ](D)[A][C] lines. However, as Excerpt 9 demonstrates, T1 was not present when L10 first clearly understood what "coral" means. In other words, L10's breakthrough in understanding occurred during student-student talk that is organized via a learner-initiated [Q][A][C] sequence. Thus, while we are certainly not in the position to claim that the use of a [CQ] (D) strategy by T1 *caused* L10 to understand and learn what "coral" means, we can certainly claim that, in this instance, the use of this turn-taking organization by the teacher during her interactions with learners (see, for example Excerpt 6) did not ultimately *prevent* L10 from first

understanding this word and subsequently constructing the kind of comprehensible output instantiated in the public definition that demonstrates successful learning within the time-frame of a single lesson.

While these results are interesting, they are quite preliminary. In a replication study which used the same kinds of definition data and the same conversation analytic methodology used in Markee (1994a) and in the present paper, Markee (1994b) showed that learners may fail to understand the larger discoursal meaning of a problematic item. The data base for this analysis consists of a collection of seven excerpts which document one learner's (L15) attempts in Class 2 to understand the problem phrase "We cannot get by Auschwitz" (see Excerpt 8 in the present paper, which reproduces part of the last excerpt in this collection).

Markee shows that L15's attempts to understand the word "Auschwitz," and later the entire phrase "We cannot get by Auschwitz" are unsuccessful because L15 does not know enough about the Holocaust to understand why Germany's Nazi past might be a considered a moral impediment to German re-unification. Thus, in this instance, at least, it does not really matter whether participants orient to a [Q][CQ](D)[A][C] turn-taking system or a [Q](R)[A][C] turn-taking system to attempt to get comprehensible input, since L15's principal problem is not linguistic at all, it is a general lack of familiarity with the topic of the Holocaust.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SLA RESEARCH

In summary, while Interpretations 2 and 3 in the previous sub-section seem to offer more plausible accounts of the acquisitional utility of the data reproduced in Excerpts 6, 4/8 and 9 than Interpretation 1 does, we should beware of jumping to any definitive conclusions about the theoretical (un)desirability of particular question types and associated turn-taking systems. I believe that it is actually still an open question what the empirically verifiable effects of referential and display questions actually are on second language development.

While the learning of a single vocabulary item may seem a relatively trivial learning act, these data are potentially of considerable theoretical importance because providing empirical support for Long's (1980) theory of SLA involves a three-step process. This process consists of: 1) showing that a) linguistic or conversational adjustments promote b) comprehensible input; 2) showing that b) comprehensible input promotes c) acquisition; and 3) deducing that a) linguistic or conversational adjustments promote c) acquisition (Long, 1985). This three-step process has been criticized on the grounds that it is impossible to demonstrate Step 2 (Ellis, 1990). Given the evidence that is presented by Markee (1994a) and summarized here, this is perhaps an over-statement since, if Long's theory of SLA is correct, the interaction in which L10 engaged in

Excerpt 9 can be interpreted as an instance of comprehensible input which leads to comprehensible output and demonstrated learning of this vocabulary item in the formal definition. This is important because these data are, if not the only, certainly one of the very few, published examples in the SLA literature of actually observed talk that leads to demonstrated learning (see also Ellis, Tanaka & Yamasazi, 1994). However, precisely because such examples of actually observed comprehensible input and output are so rare in the literature, these results can only serve as the basis for further research on the putative effects of display and referential questions on language learning.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have shown that all three teachers studied here tended to avoid answering vocabulary-related questions initiated by students in a direct fashion. While there was individual variation among teachers regarding which strategy they used most frequently, all used a [CQ] (D) strategy as a resource for dealing with students' [Q] turns. The observable effect of this strategy from a turn-taking viewpoint was to turn communication-oriented definition tasks initiated by students during small group work into teacher-fronted language display activities that were governed by the conventions of unequal power discourse.

However, the theoretical interest of these data go well beyond the technical insights gained into the turn-taking behavior of participants enrolled in classes that were taught via a small group methodology. These data in fact highlight important problems that must be solved satisfactorily if we wish to construct adequate theories of learning. For example, this paper has shown that, contrary to expectations, perhaps, the "non-communicative" use of language analyzed here is potentially acquisitionally quite useful.

In addition, we must understand that all theories are constructed on the basis of both research and ideology. For example, the decision in this paper to address issues in SLA theory from an ethnomethodological rather than from a nomological perspective is an ideological decision. Theories of teaching are clearly also heavily influenced by different ways of doing research. Furthermore, theories of teaching are often also influenced by ideas imported from the philosophy of education. A good example of such an influence is the widely-accepted idea that students should be encouraged to become independent and autonomous learners.

While I share this ideological preference, it is important to understand that theories of teaching that are based on a synthesis between the kind of micro-analytic research exemplified in this paper and insights from the philosophy of education may well lead us to some potentially surprising conclusions. For example, the use of group work is often justified by communicative

methodologists as a means of giving students the opportunity to interact in a less structured fashion than is possible during teacher-fronted interaction. Furthermore, it is often claimed that group work makes learners more responsible for their own learning.

If we view communicative language teaching as a type of pedagogy in which turn-taking decisions about who says what to whom and when are not necessarily pre-determined (Nunan, 1987), then it may be argued that, in methodological terms, at least, it is contradictory for teachers to use a [CQ] (D) strategy during small group work. As argued previously, the use of this turn-taking strategy makes it impossible to distinguish group work empirically from teacher-fronted work since, *whether teachers consciously realize this or not*, the technical effect of using this strategy enables teachers to regain control over both the content and the trajectory of the interaction. Thus, the use of this strategy defeats the very purpose of using small group work in the first place: to promote more varied interaction by allowing learners to engage in locally-managed talk.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the use of a [CQ] (D) strategy during small group work does not actually promote learner independence because the teacher remains in control of both the content and sequential development of the interaction. Finally, it may be argued that a [CQ] (D) strategy is not "communicative" in a methodological sense for the simple reason that display questions do not promote a use of language whose *primary* purpose is to communicate *unknown* information. In contrast, the use of an [A] strategy to respond to learners' [Q] turns, coupled with a [CQ] (R) strategy as appropriate, seems eminently "communicative" because the *principal* function of these behaviors is precisely to promote the exchange of *unknown* information.

On the basis of these arguments, therefore, we might minimally conclude that, despite their wide currency, "communicative language teaching," "group work" and "teacher-" or "student-centered" instruction are extremely ambiguous terms, which the profession would be well-advised to use with great care. A stronger version of this argument might even go so far as to assert that these terms are frequently no more than fashionable, though largely meaningless, buzz words. Yet, whichever of these two positions we might be tempted to espouse (assuming that we find such arguments convincing and do not put forward alternative analyses of our own), the fact remains that for learners, the "bottom line" is not whether a class is run on "communicative" lines but whether the interaction that occurs in that class is acquisitionally useful for them. As this example demonstrates, it is often difficult to reconcile the implications of ideology and empirical research.

In conclusion, given our current state of knowledge about language learning and teaching, it seems to me that we are only just beginning to understand how tremendously complex even relatively small learning acts are. We therefore need to be aware that any analyses of second language classrooms and any conclusions we come to on the basis of such analyses are open to multiple interpretations. For these reasons, I offer the data and interpretations discussed in this paper as a

basis for on-going research on the following question, which reformulates Step 2 in the three-step program of research originally proposed by Long (1985): "What are the actual, empirically-observed consequences for learning of different types of classroom talk?"

NOTES

[1] This contrasts with the focus on global practices which characterized earlier methods-oriented SLCR.

[2] Thus, like many other studies in SLCR, this paper investigates issues which cut across categorical boundaries.

[3] Of course, as Banbrook & Skehan (1990) point out, we should be cautious when we use such terms as display and referential questions. For example, as we can see from an analysis of Excerpt A below, when T2 does her first turn at line 4, she clearly wishes the learner who bids for next turn to define the word "Auschwitz." We can tell this from the subsequent turns that she does at lines 6, 8 and 10. In this sense, the turn at line 4 is a request for the learner who takes up the turn to display his/her knowledge for the benefit of L12, who initiated this sequence with her question at line 3. Consequently, we may analyze T2's turn at line 4 as a *display* question. But L6, who takes the next turn at line 5, initially says "yeah" before he expands on this answer and says "concentration camp." L6's initial response prompts T2 to interpret the learner's initial answer as a response to a *referential* question. This misinterpretation on T2's part leads her to overlap the second part of L6's answer with her first request at line 6 directed specifically at L6 that he explain the meaning of "Auschwitz" for L12. At line 8, T2 issues her second request to L6, which is overlapped by the beginning of L6's next turn at line 9. T2 then issues a third request for a definition at line 10, which this time is not overlapped. L6 is finally able to display his knowledge and does the requested definition at lines 13-15.

Excerpt A

```
1  L12:      <h> Mary
2  T:        yeah
3  L12:      what's the meaning of (+) Ausch[v]itz?
4  T:        d- uhm does anybody here know what Auschwitz was?
5  L6:       yeah//concentration camp//
6  T:              //you want to explain it//
7  (+)
8  T:        //explain it to her//
9  L6:       //Ausch[v]itz//
10 T:        explain it to Hiroko
11 (+)
12 L6:       uh its a concentration camp, and (+) uh they would send some
13 uh (+) Jews there, to (++) to gas them to kill them (++) uh
14 during the world war two (+) in Germany (1) I don:'t kno:w
15 I'm not (+) quite sure ...
              (Class 2, Phase 1 group 4)
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An anonymous reviewer of *Issues in Applied Linguistics* makes a similar point when she/he notes:
> While the [CQ](D) strategy looks like the usual [Q](D) strategy used by teachers in teacher-fronted classes, [there may be] functional differences between the two. While the usual [Q](D) strategy serves purely pedagogical goals, the [CQ](D) strategy, especially when it is preceded by a [CQ](R), seems to serve first communicative goals. The teacher has first difficulty in answering the student's question because the vocabulary item requested is taken out of context; the teacher requests more context with a [CQ](R), but even when she gets its, I am not sure she has a ready-made definition of the word in her head that she is just asking the student to "display." Her [CQ](D) seems almost like a [CQ](R) (e.g., Excerpt 2, line 17, Excerpt 3 line 5, Excerpt 4, line 9). Her [CQ](D) sounds dangerously like "I don't know the answer so you give me one." Which might lead one to conclude that the terms "display" and

"referential" have to be treated with caution, since a teacher question can fulfill at once referential and display purposes ...

[4] Note that versions of Excerpts A, 1, 5 and 7 have already been published by Nicholls (1993), on whose analysis I build and expand in the present paper.

APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions: Adapted from van Lier (1988)

T:	teacher
L1, L2, etc:	identified learner
L:	unidentified learner
L3?:	probably learner 3 (L3)
LL:	several or all learners simultaneously
/yes//yah//ok// :	overlapping or simultaneous listening
///huh?///oh/// :	responses, brief comments, etc., by two, three, or an unspecified number of learners
=:	a) turn continues below, at the next identical symbol
	b) if inserted at the end of one speaker's turn and the beginning of the next speaker's adjacent turn, it indicates that there is no gap at all between the two turns
(+) (++) (1):	pauses; (+) = a pause of between .1 and .5 of a second; (++) = a pause of between .6 and .9 of a second; and (1) (2) (3) = pauses of one, two or three seconds respectively.
?:	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
!:	strong emphasis with falling intonation
ok. now. well., etc:	a period indicates falling (final) intonation
so, the next thing:	a comma indicates low-rising intonation suggesting continuation
e:r, the:::, etc:	one or more colons indicate lengthening of the preceding sound
emphasis:	italic type indicates marked stress
SYLVIA:	capitals indicate increased volume
°the next thing:	degree sign indicates decreased volume
. . . . (radio):	single brackets indicate unclear or probable item
((coughs)):	double brackets indicate comments about the transcript, including non-verbal actions
((unintelligible)):	indicates a stretch of talk that is unintelligible to the analyst
no-:	a hyphen indicates an abrupt cut-off, with level pitch
Peter:	capitals are used only for proper names, not to indicate beginnings of sentences
[si:m]:	square brackets indicate phonetic transcription
<hhh>:	in-drawn breath
hhh:	exhaled breath
(hhh):	laughter tokens

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