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Six lessons: cultural continuity in communicative language teaching

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Ideas about good teaching emerged from one-off ethnographic observations of six 'communicative' university English language classes in China and India. The lessons were all taught by non-native speakers in classes of between 25 and 45. Through analysis of the behaviour and physical environment of the culture of each classroom, it emerged that aspects of a popular view of 'communicative' connected with group-work, oral practice and teacher withdrawal may be questioned. Instead, cultural continuity between traditional and innovative forms emerges as an essential feature of successful communicative language teaching.

I Setting the scene

This paper is about what makes 'good' 'communicative' English language teaching as discovered through an ethnographic study of six undergraduate university lessons. The lessons were observed while carrying out consultancy work in China and India. Various signs of 'good' 'communicative' teaching began to emerge. I shall first explain how the observations were viable as ethnographic research, and then present my substantive analysis supported by reference to the observation notes, and conclude with implications for some of our 'taken-for-granted' notions about classroom methodology and the wider profession.

1 Viable ethnography

What might be termed the 'standard' ethnography, as represented for example in Spradley (1980), would comprise:

a) An extended study of a specified cultural environment. This could be almost anything – a community, a place of work, a

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small group of people, a set of documents, or even a single person or activity.

b) An interpretive, qualitative approach where significant features of the culture are allowed to emerge. This involves direct observation of behaviour which is written up into an ethnographic record.

c) The emergent significant features of the culture lead the researcher to focus in a particular direction and to develop categories which provide the structure for description and analysis.

d) There is no claim to objectivity. There is simply a collection of illuminating instances which can contribute to the wider picture. The scientific rigour and system are in the discipline of researcher procedure which comprises tight rules concerning how the researcher relates to and writes about the research environment.

The outcome is thus *an ethnography*, which comprises a holistic description and analysis of all the features which the researcher has found significant. It is the result of considerable burrowing, sorting and sifting of data, and stands alone as an independent study, much like a painting or a novel. It becomes a testimony as much to the researcher's own perspective as to the features he/she has noted (Thornton, 1988).

In contrast to this, ethnography attached to a specific area of study such as education is *applied* in the sense that there is a preoccupation with certain issues within the professional-academic area in question. The research will thus be more guided and less 'pure'.[1] I wish nevertheless to claim that a study can still be ethnographic if the methodological rigour in (b) to (d) above is maintained. This allows for considerable relaxation in the locational and longitudinal aspects of (a). In a sense, when the researcher is constantly within the professional-academic environment of his/her study, this locational and longitudinal factor is *always* there and does not need to be created. Any location will draw on an experience of other locations; and any instance will draw from longitudinal experience within which the instance is set. The following study is thus not *an* ethnography, but an ethnograph*ic* study of a varied and locationally spread

environment of classrooms in different institutions and even different countries. It also studies instances of the wider professional-academic system to which all these classrooms belong rather than being in any way an ethnography of an individual classroom or type of classroom. (Consider the study of 69 classrooms at 17 different university sites, involving 20 lecturers and 28 groups of students in Holliday (1991), which was broad-based rather than longitudinal.)

A further difference between this type of study and more traditional ethnographies is that the data is separated from the discussion. Because of the diverse source of data, I feel it is all the more important to identify the data very precisely in the text, as an entity to which the discussion and analysis refers either in summary, paraphrase or verbatim – very much as with reference to literature or other forms of evidence. This increases the accountability of the study and enables other researchers to be more discerning in their reference to it. This study is therefore, once again, not an ethnography because it is not a whole ethnographic account in which all the data is manipulated. It is instead a discussion and analysis of instances of ethnographic observation which are referred to as a body of data separate to the discussion. If there is *an* ethnography related to this discussion and analysis, it is ongoing, in the perceptions and experience of all the people carrying out ethnographic observation in the wider field. It is thus contributing to and building on a wider 'sociological imagination' of the field (Holliday, 1996).

The data itself, to which this discussion and analysis refers, comprises ethnographic observation notes of the six lessons. This data is raw in that it is prior to analysis and discussion, and could be used in other analysis and discussion. However, it does involve a degree of interpretation and even evaluation on the part of the observer. This is not verbatim data, but a record of behaviour. It cannot therefore claim to be 'emic' – an untouched account of the internal – in the same way that verbatim data can (cf. the discussion of emicism and its alternatives in Holliday, 1996). Moreover, nothing that is reported in the words of the observer can avoid the influence of the observer's ideology. Even the most apparently innocent of expressions have the potential of being 'naturalized' ideological representations (Fairclough, 1995: 33–36). As soon as

the observer begins to write, he/she is imposing his/her own subjective construction upon the situation (Thornton, 1988). Impossible to avoid, this has to be acknowledged in the analysis and discussion along with the whole set of agendas (see below). The observation notes which are referred to are indeed in their 'final', written-up form, and have been edited to ensure anonymity.

2 Agenda

Although ethnography requires interest to emerge, it is impossible not to have an agenda, especially in applied fields where researchers begin with professional issues. It is important to state this agenda for the reader to be able to interpret the findings better. My making of an ethnographic record of the lessons was routine, as I now do this wherever the opportunity allows. However, what I saw in the lessons brought into focus an issue with which I have been preoccupied for some time: Can communicative language teaching, which has developed within the commercially oriented institutions of Britain, Australasia and North America (BANA), work within state sector tertiary, secondary and primary educational contexts (TESEP) in under-resourced parts of the developing world or where wider educational issues are involved (Holliday, 1994).[2] There is a popular perception (e.g. Tomlinson, 1990; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1985; Nolasco and Arthur, 1986) that communicative language teaching cannot work within TESEP environments where it goes against traditional educational needs, expectations and logistics, because it:

1) gives primacy to oral practice and little importance to grammar
2) requires that this practice be equally distributed amongst all the students in the classroom
3) sees group or pair work as the major mechanism for enabling (2)
4) requires that the teacher relinquishes a 'front' position and the authority which goes with this
5) can only work in small classes of less than 20 students with a 'U'-shaped seating arrangement designed for cross-class communication[3]
6) requires complex linguistic interaction which can only be

managed by native speaker teachers and is better suited to multilingual class groups who need English as a lingua franca.

This may indeed be a misconception (e.g. Thompson, 1996) derived from a limited version of aspects of 'weak' communicative language teaching which has been packaged for export (Allwright, 1982; Holliday, 1995). However, for the sake of discussion, I shall term this perception the *popular view* of communicative language teaching. My view is that communicative language teaching is not limited to this popular view, and that there are deeper communicative principles which are transferable. I shall not list what I think these *communicative principles* are here, but shall let them emerge from the study. It is therefore significant that the six classrooms in the study are all in TESEP contexts. They all have non-native speakers, local lecturers and monolingual student groups of between 25 and 45, providing me with an excellent opportunity to pursue my interest.[4]

This concern with the transfer of methodology between BANA and TESEP environments is influenced by suggestions of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and postmodern critiques of so-called 'learner-centred' education (Pennycook, 1994; Usher and Edwards, 1994), which also enter my agenda. I do not, however, necessarily agree with all these views. Indeed, I am probably out to discredit the sort of macroregional cultural confrontation set out in Phillipson and Pennycook, in which the educators of the 'periphery' fall back powerless against the advances of the 'centre' West. There is no evidence to suggest that the lecturers in this study have not taken things into their own hands and manipulated their perceptions of communicative language teaching to suit their own purposes.

My ethnographic orientation leads me to look at the different classrooms as small societies. My sociological orientation, from the structuralist sociology of Durkheim, the social action theories of Weber, to Marx's sociology of conflict, leads me to think of success or failure within these classroom societies not simply in terms of language learning, but in terms of social cohesion. Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theory of the social construction of reality also helps me to look freshly at the issue of teacher 'frontedness' and authority as something which does not necessarily oppose an

appropriate sharing of classroom opportunity. Indeed, perceptions about what is acceptable or unacceptable authority and participant opportunity will be constructed within particular classroom cultures and their wider institutional and societal influences or, in the case of 'received' perceptions, by the current dominant professional-academic group. These perceptions are therefore relative to, and must be investigated within, specific social contexts. Foucault's notion of power as a 'productive network which runs through the whole social body' (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 89, citing Foucault) suggests that the realization of authority and opportunity in the classroom is highly complex and cannot be seen simply in terms of an arithmetical account of who speaks when.

3 The lessons

All the lecturers are using new textbooks or trial textbook materials. They all have the stated aim of teaching integrated language skills 'communicatively'; and it is taken as a given that they all believe that they are teaching 'communicatively'. It is of course a limitation of this piece of research that it is impossible to know these lecturers' thoughts about the communicative approach without taking the research further and asking them.

   All lecturers are referred to arbitrarily as female because their gender has no relevance to the analysis. Neither is it revealed whether the lessons were in India or China, because these details did not seem to be significant in differentiating between or explaining behaviour in the lessons. I would argue that it is a distraction to begin analysis with national cultural considerations. The countries in question do have very different education systems and policies (cf. Sharpe, 1995); one has English as a second language, the other as a foreign language. However, these differences did not emerge as being significant in the classrooms observed. I take the following advice from an anthropologist:

> It was wrong to 'tribalise' people. It was wrong both politically and academically to say that what Africans did, they did because they were Maasai or Kikuyu, Luo or some other ethnic group. 'An African miner is a miner' was a neat phrase that . . . served as a slogan against reducing people's culture to their tribal or ethnic identity. (Baumann, 1996: 1, citing Gluckman)

What is said here about 'tribe' and 'ethnicity' also applies to nation. My references to 'culture' will therefore be first and foremost to that of the classroom. This also reveals another agenda – to explore an alternative to the 'onion-skin' theory in which small cultures, such as in classrooms, are set within and influenced by progressively larger cultures, from institution to community, to nation, etc. (e.g. Kennedy, 1988). The alternative view sees small cultures such as in classrooms connected also to the cultures of the classrooms outside the onion in other parts of the world within an international education-related culture (Holliday, 1994: 29). Thus, it is feasible in this study to consider a classroom cultural complex extending beyond national boundaries. This has powerful implications for the ways in which we characterize classrooms, students and teachers.

The references to the observation notes indicate the headings of Environment, Lecturer, Interaction and Discussion. These correspond with the categories under which the notes have been organized.[5] The discussion section refers to anything arising from discussion with the lecturer after the lesson, which I tried to arrange where possible. I see these categories as an arbitrary means for organizing information, which has been found useful in other research projects (e.g. Holliday, 1991). However, on deeper reflection, the fronting of 'environment' and 'lecturer' do represent an approach to the classroom, and indeed any scenario under study, which places 'interaction' within the context of physical classroom environment and individual attributes of key participants.[6] The concluding 'discussion' section, where it exists, further qualifies what happens in the interaction. The 'interaction' does not therefore stand alone as independent data, but has meanings determined largely by context.

Each of the lessons has been given a distinguishing name – Research, Groups, Competent, Translation, Formal, and Discussion, which will help the reader through the maze of references to them. These names represent an emergent significant feature of the overall personality of each lesson, but they do not represent the ostensible aims of the lessons or the intentions of the individual lecturers. There is no intention that these labels should carry any value.[7] Because there is insufficient space to include the observation notes of each lesson in full, Figure 1 provides an

introductory description of each.

II Analysis

I shall now proceed with the analysis and discussion, under four headings: The place of text, accuracy and fluency, lecturer authority and control, cultural continuity. Like the lesson names, these headings are emergent and interpretive, arising from the data during the process of studying the raw observation notes. They did not in any way comprise an observation check-list. Nevertheless, some of them address issues raised by the *popular view* of communicative language teaching listed on pages 215–16. It is natural and unavoidable that important issues should be *found* in the text of the observations.

A convenient entry into the analysis is the different ways in which the lecturers realize 'communicative', some of which conform to the popular view, and some which seem to fulfil communicative principles in other ways. Table 1 shows this by listing lesson features which were found to mark this differentiation during the process of observation. It also shows features which might be expected to inhibit 'communicative' teaching. The top half of the table lists features of student behaviour (1–5). Beneath these are features of lecturer behaviour (a–g); and, in the bottom section (i–iv), classroom environmental features. 'Experienced' (a) signifies more than two years' teaching experience and some form of professional 'training'. Two cases were 'senior' teachers in their departments, both of whom had been to Britain on Master's courses; one was the principal of the college. The incidence of these features in each lesson is marked by ticks ($\sqrt{\sqrt{}}$ = significant and $\sqrt{}$ = less so).

Most of the categories should be self-explanatory. However, 'communicate creatively with' ((3) and (4)) suggests that the student responds to the text in question in terms of all its communicative meanings. The difference between 'dominates discourse' and 'directs classroom discourse' ((e) and (f)) is that the former implies taking over, hogging all the talk, excluding others; whereas the latter implies control which facilitates development of the discourse. 'complex exchanges' (b) are those which involve more than one student, and involving other students

Research lesson

Environment
Long 'well-windowed room, with much noise from outside and poor acoustics'.
'25 students . . . seated around the edges behind desks' on which there are 'many books and dictionaries'.
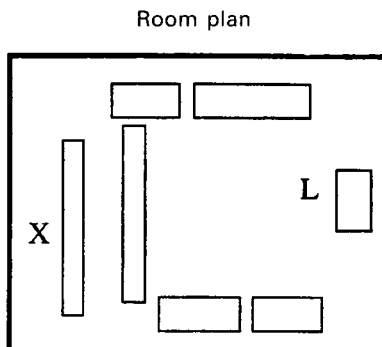*Lecturer*
'In early 20s' with 'no training in teaching'.
Interaction
Whole class and some pair activities with lecturer at the front.

Reading activities and discussion involving 'atmosphere of research'.

Room plan

Groups lesson

Environment
'Large and airy' room, with 'poor acoustics'.
'25 students . . . seated around the room in small groups on chairs with study arms.'
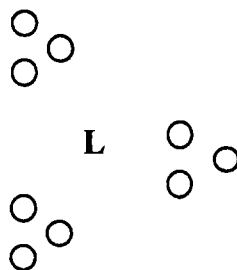*Lecturer*
'In 20s–30s, very tall.'
Interaction
Group activities with lecturer mainly in the middle.

Reading activities and discussion.

Room arrangement

Competent lesson

Environment
'25 students . . . seated around the wall of the classroom, some with desks but most without.'
Lecturer
'In 30s, clearly experienced and fairly senior.'
Interaction
Whole class and some group activities with lecturer seated at front occasionally walking around.

Reading activities and discussion, dictation.
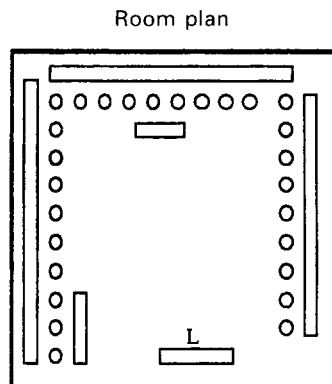An air of competence throughout.

Room plan

Figure 1   Lesson summaries

Formal lesson

Environment
'20 students seated in fixed rows, two per desk . . . very little space for movement . . . good acoustics.'
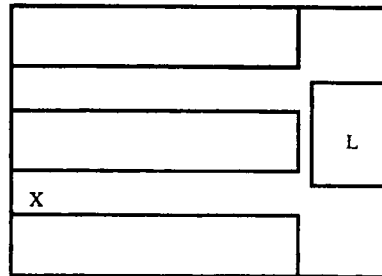*Lecturer*
20s–30s 'stands at podium'.
Interaction
Whole class and some pair activities, with lecturer remaining at front.

Reading activities and discussion, very formal atmosphere throughout.

Room plan

Translation lesson

Environment
'Large room with 32 students seated at wooden school desks in rows, about three to a desk.'
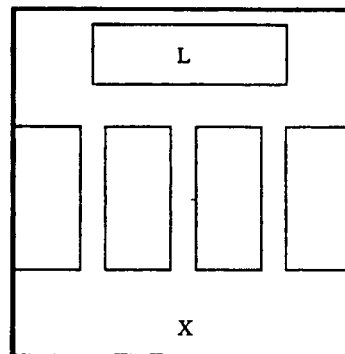*Lecturer*
'Fairly inexperienced young person.'
Interaction
Whole class and some group activities with lecturer 'on a plinth behind a lectern . . . throughout the lesson'.

Translation activities, choral work, reading.

Room plan

Discussion lesson

Environment
'45 students. Neat rows, good study chairs, poor acoustics . . . blackboard and OHP.' Girls and boys at different sides of the room.
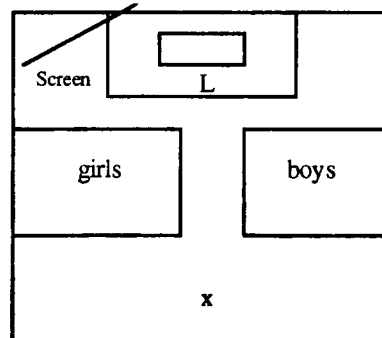*Lecturer*
'Principal . . . stands high on plinth.'
Interaction
Whole class and group activities, with lecturer remaining at front and walking around class.

Reading activities and discussion.

Room plan

Note: In the room plans, L represents the main position of the lecturer and X my position as observer where this is relevant.

Table 1 'Communicative'-related features

	Research	Groups	Competent	Translation	Formal	Discussion
Students						
1) Practise language in groups or pairs	√	√√		√√	√√	√√
2) Work with focus text in groups or pairs	√	√√			√	√√
3) Communicate creatively with focus text	√√		√√			√
4) Communicate creatively with classroom discourse	√√	√√	√√	√√		√√
5) Answer individual teacher questions	√	√√	√		√√	√
Lecturer						
a) Experienced, 'trained'	√√	√√	√√		√	√√
b) Organizes complex exchanges	√√	√√	√			√√
c) Organizes simple exchanges	√	√√	√√	√√	√√	√
d) Remains in front	√√	√√	√	√√√	√√	√
e) Dominates discourse	√√	√	√√	√√√	√√	√√
f) Directs classroom discourse	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√
g) Is concerned with accuracy	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√	√
Environment						
i) U-shaped with desks	√√		√			
ii) Groups with study chairs		√				
iii) 'Formal' rows					√	√
iv) √ = 10+ students	√√	√√	√√	√√√	√√	√√√

in listening to it; 'simple exchanges' (c) are between lecturer and single student.

1 The place of text

A brief glance at Table 1 shows that the realization of 'communicative' in the Research, Discussion and Competent lessons is through students communicating creatively with the focus text and the discourse of the classroom (3 and 4). I use the term 'focus text' to refer generally to the text upon which the lesson focuses for pedagogic transaction. This might be written in the textbook, on the blackboard or other display, in students' written work, in teachers' written comments, or spoken in audio recordings, teacher or student speech. Here it refers more specifically to the written text which the students have to read or, in the case of the *formal* lesson, to the spoken text to which they have to listen. Communicating creatively with the focus text is not emphasized in the popular view of communicative language teaching (pages 215–16). Nevertheless, it qualifies as com-municative in that the communicative competence of the students is engaged through the complexity of interaction with text. This is enhanced by the organization of complex exchanges (b) which also occur only in the Research and Discussion lessons. The focus text is most central in the Research lesson. It features in the very first moments of the lesson in a complex way when the class:

> ... are asked to look at the text and 'find interesting points'. ... They have to look at three lists and cross-refer between them. [Then] ... during the discussion, the text is constantly kept central as the lecturer refers the students back to it. (Research: interaction)

This appears essential in maintaining the atmosphere of research characteristic of the lesson (Research: interaction). Indeed, the students have to relate the focus written and spoken texts very carefully. In so doing, they need to communicate actively with or attend to the communication of all parties in the classroom.

The Discussion lesson is particularly interesting in that it displays many of the discursive aspects of the Research lesson. There is complex interaction between various parties, requiring those not orally involved to be attentive to the whole discourse of

the lesson, and the class is often invited to refer back to the focus text (Discussion: interaction). Also, there is a significant period in the middle of the lesson where the class work in groups to read the focus text and prepare answers to skimming questions, which they also have to read, and:

> The lecturer sits at her desk and gets on with her work for a moment, writing herself. She contributes to the atmosphere of research by studying text and watching students ... The lecturer then walks around the students watching what they are doing. Then sits again when sure all are on task and continues to *read* the text herself. (Discussion: interaction)

However, although the Discussion lesson begins with the focus written text, 'generally, *text is used to support discussion instead of discussion used to support text*' (Discussion: interaction). The reasons for this cannot be known, but one might suspect that the lecturer is more drawn to the popular view of communicative language teaching and therefore gives more importance to oral development through discussion than the development of communicative reading skills.

In contrast, the Groups, Formal and Translation lessons, although they conform to the popular view of communicative language teaching by incorporating group work for the purpose of practising language (point 3 on page 215), the use of the focus texts is less communicative than in the other lessons. In the Groups lesson, although the lecturer instructs the class to 'read the passage and discuss the questions with your group members' (Groups: interaction), the lecturer's 'loud' talk throughout the lesson keeps her own discourse more dominant (e, Table 1) than either the focus written text or the students' discourse:

> The lecturer then reviews the questions – 'What is the subject [of the focus written text]? Why is the subject relevant?' Some students suggest answers; and the lecturer repeats the answer louder – then – 'What about this group?' The students listen to the lecturer's answer. When the students provide answers, this is not to the whole group. The students are not encouraged to *communicate* the answers; and students in other groups cannot hear when a student speaks. (Groups: interaction)

Thus, the focus written text is presented to the class through questions and answers which are transformed into a

teacher–student question–answer routine (5, Table 1) dominated by the lecturer. The class does embark on more extended group work in which they have to read the focus text and take notes.

> Nevertheless, at the feedback stage the lecturer's loud lecturing-mode voice is contrasted with the students' mumblings. Loud 'is this suitable' from the lecturer – mumbled reply 'yes' from the students. (Groups: interaction).

Similarly, in the *translation* and *formal* lessons, the focus written and spoken texts, rather than being used directly for communicative activity, are mainly a catalyst for relatively closed-ended questions from the lecturer and minimal responses from the students (5). In the former the focus text is a stimulus for choral work, yes–no questions, lengthy explanation of new words and syntactic structures (Translation: interaction). 'There is a routine: instructions; silent reading; choral answers; individual answers; correction on blackboard' (Translation: interaction). Although 'the lecturer does use the book and all the exercises' (Translation: interaction), the students do not seem encouraged to *communicate* with the focus text, or to address its communicative purpose. In the *formal* lesson, despite the fact that:

> The students are clearly reading and then listening [and] when they have written answers to the questions they are asked to 'check with partner' that they have got them right. (Formal: interaction)

they are quickly led away from the focus text:

> 'For three minutes they are asked to read their answers aloud to partners and then discuss. They are given prompts for the discussion – 'Do you think . . . ; yes I think . . .'. This is not really a discussion, simply reading aloud from set cues. (Formal: interaction)

.Also, the lecturer misses the opportunity of letting the students engage communicatively with the activity instructions, as she '*reads out* all the instructions', not giving the students the opportunity to read them for themselves (Formal: interaction). A 'distant and ritualistic' atmosphere is contributed to when, 'on several occasions, the students answer her questions in unison' (Formal: interaction). That the students are asked to work on the focus texts in *groups* or pairs in the Groups and Formal lessons (2, Table 1)

does not seem sufficient to prevent this overall lock-step ambience of the lessons.

It therefore seems that the use of focus text in the Groups, Translation and Formal lessons is less communicative in that the degree to which the involvement of students in complex, creative communication with the focus text is a less overt feature. This is not to say that the students' communicative competence is not engaged throughout these lessons. There is engagement in the sense that a person's communicative competence must be engaged in *any* social activity. Even where the major activity is straight teacher–student questioning and answering (5, Table 1), the student has to work out the appropriate response within a very specific role relationship, thus addressing a language problem – working out how best to 'succeed' in answering lecturer questions. However, although the communicative competence of the students is engaged in the Formal and Translation lessons, this engagement is incidental and not on the overt pedagogical agenda as it is in the Research and Discussion lessons. What makes the Formal and Translation lessons different to the Research and Discussion lessons might be that the overt discourses of the former seem less critical than the latter with respect to the target language itself. Conformity to the popular view in the Formal and Translation lessons – simply having groups practise language – does not therefore seem sufficient.

2 Accuracy and fluency

A further interesting feature is the way in which fluency and accuracy are dealt with. The popular view is that communicative language teaching is not interested in accuracy, which is normally thought of as attention to grammar (point 1 on page 215). It is therefore significant that all except the Discussion lesson have at least some attention to accuracy (g, Table 1). However, the means whereby accuracy is addressed takes two forms. In the Groups, Translation and Formal lessons, it takes the form of the lecturer correcting the students' answers to questions (Groups: interaction), explaining structures (Translation: interaction) or choral repetition (Formal: interaction), which is thus in direct opposition to the popular view. Once again, although the students' communicative

competence is bound to be engaged in these activities, the overall quality of communicative engagement seems low.

This does not, however, mean that accuracy cannot be an integral part of a communicative approach. In the Research and Competent lessons the concern with accuracy takes on a more integrated, organic form which increases the quality of communicative engagement. It is not simply to do with grammatical correctness. In the Research lesson it is centred on the precise language and evidence with which the students are constantly asked to support what they say. The fact that 'throughout there is precise timing and precision in *everything that is said and done*' (Research: interaction) is essential to the research atmosphere. Similarly, in the Competent lesson, 'there is a precise atmosphere with gravity' (Competent: interaction). Also, where details of grammar are addressed in the Competent lesson, it is integrated with the research element as the students:

> underline words that have to be stressed – key words. They then read out individually along with an explanation for why the words they have chosen are stressed. There is then discussion, then lecturer explanation. (Competent: interaction)

Although the dictation in the Competent lesson is partly a stimulus for discussion, there is also attention to accuracy in spelling (Competent: interaction). Although there seems to be less attention to accuracy in the Discussion lesson, the lecturer does give attention to precision in utterance and reference. She 'engages the student about what she has said. She looks at her and mouths with her in support', making sure that the language which comes out is adequate to the task outcome. (Discussion: interaction)

The irony is that, where accuracy and grammar are dealt with in this more integral and organic way, the students are not always aware of this. It is my experience of the contexts in which the lessons take place that a major criticism of the type of teaching observed here is that it does not deal with 'grammar'. This is exemplified in the Research lesson, where some of the students

> do not seem to appreciate the degree to which grammar and accuracy has been dealt with throughout the lesson. They see this as a discussion lesson. One says that it is 'Western culture' to have fluency without grammar. (Research: discussion)

It therefore seems that, on the one hand attention to accuracy is not in opposition to 'communicative' in the six lessons and, on the other, attention to accuracy does remain problematic. Either it does not involve a high degree of communicative engagement (Groups, Formal, Translation lessons), or it is not made sufficiently explicit to satisfy some students' expectations (Research lesson). Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the lecturers in the Research, Competent and Discussion lessons would not have the ability to make attention to accuracy more explicit, while at the same time maintaining a high degree of communicative engagement. It may well be that all the lecturers in this study *perceive* attention to accuracy as being opposed to 'communicative'. They *therefore* either separate it from so-called communicative activities, in the popular view (Groups, Formal, Translation lessons), or address it surreptitiously, or even without knowing (Research, Competent, Discussion lessons).

3 Lecturer authority and control

Another area of controversy in the popular view of 'communicative' is that of lecturer authority, where the teacher is not expected to take a strong teacher position in the classroom (point 4 on page 215). Nevertheless, in all the six lessons the lecturer maintains a very strong position; however, they manage their authority in different ways. The Research, Translation and Formal lessons are all teacher-fronted (d, Table 1) in the sense that the lecturer never moves from the front of the class. The Competent and Discussion lessons are less so; the lecturer moves from the front position to other parts of the room to help students in group discussion. Similarly, in the Groups lesson the lecturer re-mains in the centre of the room while the students work in groups.

According to the popular view, it might therefore be assumed that the more teacher-fronted lessons are less 'communicative' than the Groups lesson. This does not, however, seem to be the case. The lecturers who remain at the front in the Research and Competent lessons still manage to direct classroom discourse (f) in such a way as to enable the students to communicate creatively with a variety of text ((3) and (4)). Although the lecturer in the Discussion lesson does not remain at the front, she also keeps a

strong control on what is going on within the entire scenario of
the lesson:

> Lecturer controls movement of communication by changing her own position
> in the room to ensure that the communication crosses the room and therefore
> involves the whole class [Figure 2] ... Lecturer [L] moves to the back of the
> class to balance as the student [S] is invited to the front to read something to
> the class, and faces the class (Figure 3). Now two students are standing to join
> in the dialogue to discuss the definition of *guest*. Now three students are
> standing, now four. The lecturer thus sets up a communicative network within
> the large class [Figure 4]. (Discussion: interaction)

Control is indeed key in all of these cases. Nevertheless, in the
Research, Competent and Discussion lessons especially, it is a
control which sets up a scenario in which students are *enabled*
creative communication with the texts of the lesson. This control
is therefore central to the fulfilment of communicative principles.

A significant aspect of this form of lecturer authority is that it
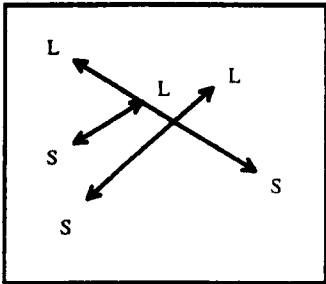is sufficiently strong to ensure a distribution of power through the
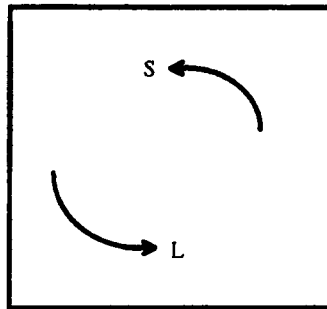
Figure 2   Cross-class discourse

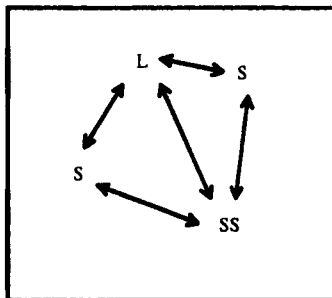**Figure 3**   Moving with student

Figure 4   Managing interaction

class. Although the lecturer in the Research lesson directs
classroom discourse, she allows other focus texts to provide
alternative authority to her own as 'students are invited to get out
their dictionaries and check her spelling – "Check it out! Look in
the dictionary" ', and 'one student is asked to read out the
definition and explain' (Research: interaction) as once again oral
explanation is referred back to the focus text. Later in the lesson,
she instructs individual students: 'If you have any doubts, check up
in some other source book' (Research: interaction), thus allowing
further creativity in the way in which the students communicate
with the discourse of the classroom (4, Table 1).

A very different type of control emerges in the Groups,
Translation and Formal lessons. At several points the lecturer
dominates the discourse of the lesson (d) often to the extent of
preventing students from taking part creatively. This is especially
the case in the *groups* lesson. Ironically, although the lecturer never
takes the front position,

> The lecturer maintains a dominant standing position throughout. When good
> ideas come from one group they are direct to the lecturer and not heard by
> other groups – a *fragmented society*. (Groups: interaction)

The last phrase here implies that the lecturer prevents the
discourse from flowing across the classroom and alienates sections
of the students who 'mumble' in their groups. Similarly, in the
Translation lesson, the lecturer's staccato directions – '*Do this* ...
Do this ... *Do this* ... *This is*' – seem to break the 'coherence' of
the lesson (Translation: interaction). Thus, the communicative
quality of the lesson is again reduced.

4 Cultural continuity

The final issue which I see emerging from these observations is
that of cultural appropriateness. The popular view of
communicative language teaching is that there is a conflict between
communicative language teaching, which is largely BANA in
orientation and origin and the 'other' cultures of the TESEP world
(see pages 215–16). In all these lessons, there is indeed significant
BANA influence in that all the new textbook materials are
connected with curriculum projects which have BANA inputs.[8]

However, there are clear indications within the lessons that considerable *cultural continuity* has been created between the more traditional and innovating scenarios. Behavioural and en-vironmental links exist between the traditional and the new which facilitate the cultural absorption of the latter (cf. Jacob, 1996).

Experience of other undergraduate classes, both in the institutions in which the lessons are situated and elsewhere, shows that the more customary seating arrangement would be front-to-back rows of chairs or benches and desks with the lecturer on a raised plinth at the front ((iii) in Table 1). This could be seen in these particular institutions by walking down the corridors and looking into rooms. The Translation and Formal lessons thus conform to the custom (see Figure 1). The arrangement of study chairs in 'neat rows' in the Discussion lesson is a variation of this. The arrangement of seats around the walls in a 'U' in the Research and Competent lessons, and the grouped study chairs in the Groups lesson are thus a marked break from the tradition. They conform more to the BANA 'learning group ideal', in which the optimum 'conditions for a process-oriented, task-based, inductive, collaborative' methodology are set (Holliday, 1994: 53).

Whether or not the lesson takes place in the more traditional TESEP arrangement does not, however, seem necessarily to affect its 'communicative' qualities. As has already been noted, the traditional arrangement of the Discussion lesson does not hinder complex cross-class discussion. The lecturer in the Formal lesson, in which 'there is very little space for movement down two aisles between the three rows and very little space at the front', never moves from the podium (Formal: environment). However, she still manages to engineer collaborative work and cross-class discussion (Formal: interaction): 'The seating arrangement, though very formal and unmovable, does not appear to inhibit communication' (Formal: environment). At the same time, the lecturer in the Groups lesson fails to create an atmosphere in which there can be creative communication with the range of texts of the lesson, despite the grouped arrangement. Thus, the seating arrangement seems neither to inhibit nor encourage communicative teaching.

This does not, however, mean that the seating arrangement is unimportant. I make the observation in the Formal lesson that the traditional rows seem important as a 'cultural bridge' – '*between a*

more traditional base and a more innovative methodology' (Formal: environment). A degree of cultural continuity is thus created which might make non-traditional aspects of the lesson more palatable. The seating arrangement supports a 'businesslike' air of formality (Formal: interaction) which the lecturer sets up, and which the students seem to respect. This lecturer seems 'distant' by nature; but her manner works within the tightly spaced setting, which, because of the proximity it enforces, allows her at the same time to be 'very *close*' (Formal: environment). Things like the seating arrangement may in some lessons thus be used by the lecturer, or, in the case of this less experienced lecturer ((a) in Table 1), work in her favour without her knowing.

In the Competent lesson, however, I note an anomaly which shows the seating arrangement to be *less* important:

> The seating seems unnatural – lots of knees and very little table space. Desks exist but are mostly *behind* the students, presumably to be out of the way. The lecturer has no desk. (Competent: environment)

This is particularly noticeable when 'it is difficult to do [the] . . . dictation without any place to write' (Competent: interaction). Then:

> I eventually realize that the desks are **behind** the students because they are attached to the seats in front, on which the students are sitting, as designed for the normal classroom seating arrangement in rows [Figure 5]. (Competent: environment)
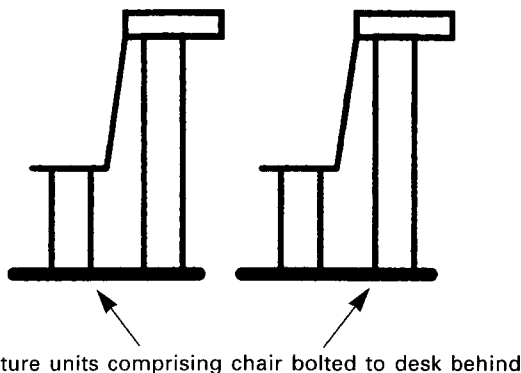

Furniture units comprising chair bolted to desk behind

Figure 5   Chair and desk arrangement in normal classroom

On asking the lecturer about this later,

> She says that I am right in thinking that the furniture was designed for a more 'traditional' row arrangement. However, the room has been laid out like this for several years since a British lecturer organized it in this way. (Competent: discussion)

This piece of classroom archaeology thus reveals an interesting history of the overlay of the BANA learning group ideal (page 231) on the traditional university class. However, it reveals that the lecturer does not seem much concerned. She has taken it as it is, and teaches despite it.

In different lessons, different factors may provide cultural continuity. The Translation lesson has 32 students tightly packed into traditional rows; and the lecturer maintains a 'ritualized and lock-step' mode (Translation: interaction). However, after the end of the lesson, on being invited to talk to the students, my local co-observer, A, succeeds in creating a 'very lively and interactive' cross-class discussion in which the students 'appear more active and intelligent than at any point during the lesson' (Translation: discussion):

> The discussion seems to be focused; and all the students somehow get involved and listen to each other. Some of them exchange notes with each other while others talk quietly to A. There is a general buzz. (Translation: discussion)

The reason for A's success in creating a more communicative atmosphere within what had seemed to be a restrictive environment is not immediately clear. However, I noted that she was 'a much older person than the lecturer and a university professor', and that she 'does not stand on the podium, but gets down amongst the students' (Translation: discussion), very much as the lecturer in the Discussion lesson. For many teachers, 'getting down amongst the students' might well create a loss of status, but this does not seem to happen with A.

Manner seems to be critical here – being able to 'carry it off'. The lecturer in the Research lesson has the presence to transform 'pandemonium and little apparent possibility for a successful lesson' (Research: environment) into 'a focused atmosphere of study and language' to the extent that 'even the traffic noise is no longer heard' (Research: interaction). Even though she is 'in early

20s, nervous and slightly affected, has had no training in teaching' (Research: lecturer) and 'stands at first awkwardly in the space at the front' (Research: environment), she clearly impresses the students with an air of knowledge and precision, and engages their intellects, referring immediately to the sophisticated notion of 'literacy' (Research: interaction). An important ingredient in the manner of several of the lecturers in the study is the status and authority which they command. The Research lecturer achieves this through her clear mastery of the subject, and the Competent and Discussion lecturers, and A in the Translation lesson, can add age or seniority to this mastery. To return to the formal lecturer who never leaves the podium – she has less mastery, age or seniority, but achieves status and authority through the formality of the lesson, using the formal seating arrangement to support this. Similarly, the lecturer in the Competent lesson uses the classroom layout to support her air of mastery of the subject. She remains seated through much of the lesson (Competent: environment), which adds to her 'masterful, cool, calm' manner (Competent: interaction).

Status, authority and formality are all central to effective cultural continuity within these university contexts, and perhaps in university contexts throughout the world. They comprise much of the expected traditional *academic* characteristics of the university lecturer. They will take different forms in different lessons. Different lecturers will achieve them in different ways if they are to be effective, using whatever resources they find at their disposal, whether these be the classroom layout or something else. Once cultural continuity is achieved in this way, the lecturer will be able to effect considerable innovation if he/she so wishes. The Groups lecturer comes out the least successful of the six in achieving this cultural continuity. My lasting impression is that her management of the lesson is motivated by an adherence to a popular view of communicative language teaching which has achieved little cultural continuity with tradition – thus creating a *'fragmented society'* in the classroom with a divided discourse (Groups, interaction).

It also seems significant that the Research lecturer comes out very well, despite the fact that she is untrained. When asked about her teaching style, she explains that 'her major motivation is to teach better than her teacher did. She felt she was treated very

badly; and she wants to make sure that she provides her students with the best' (Research: discussion). This may well be the basis of the cultural continuity which she seems to manage so well – thinking of what will be most meaningful to her students, and understanding what will engage them. One wonders to what degree cultural continuity is addressed in many training courses, and to what degree it is inhibited by popular views of technique and method which might cloud the issue and create a 'sociological blindness' and a subsequently unused local knowledge (Holliday, 1994: 133). Indeed, cultural continuity must be a central feature of 'communicative', the essence of its very central principle – to communicate with all concerned parties (Holliday, 1994: 173, citing Hutchinson and Waters).

III Implications and conclusion

It is important to emphasize once again that the observations of these six lessons can be no more than snapshot instances of teaching. Indeed, the achievements or lack of such by each of these lecturers might well be completely reversed in their other lessons. I am not therefore suggesting that, for example, the Research or Competent lecturers are always good teachers, but that *in these instances* they manage to achieve something significant. Similarly, the Groups lecturer may be having a bad day, and may never normally organize her teaching with such apparent lack of cultural continuity. She may indeed have done what she did for the sake of observation because she thought that was what was expected. Nevertheless, within the specifics of this one event important lessons about teaching can be learned. The individual lecturers are therefore not as important in this study as the dynamics of the particular events in which they find themselves.

With these reservations well in mind, the following concluding thoughts emerge:

1) Successful communicative involvement in the lessons, marked by complex engagement of the students' communicative competence, is seen more in activities involving focus texts than with oral practice.
2) There are other ways of achieving communicative involvement

than through the popular view of communicative language teaching. Group and pair work do not in themselves ensure communicative involvement, which may be achieved without them.

3) Attention to accuracy can take different forms and does not have to be 'grammar'. It remains ambivalent in its relation to 'communicative'; but this may be more to do with the attitude of the teacher than with a real opposition to 'communicative'.

4) The teacher taking up an authoritative 'front' position is not in itself in conflict with 'communicative', as long as the discourse of the lesson is not dominated by the teacher. The teacher can, however, equally well dominate the discourse of the lesson, and lessen the quality of 'communicative', from a non-'front' position.

5) The size or layout of the class (within the limits observed in this study)[9] does not necessarily inhibit communicative involvement. The layout may indeed facilitate cultural continuity. Neither does the students' sharing of a common mother tongue, or the teacher being a non-native speaker.

6) Cultural continuity between communicative language teaching and more traditional forms is necessary if innovation is to succeed. This may be achieved in a variety of ways; but the maintenance of lecturer authority and status may be the key in university settings.

Notes

[1] It has been suggested elsewhere that, because there has been a preoccupation with linguistics, there has been a tendency for ethnography in English language education to be more concerned with spoken interaction in lessons and less with other aspects of behaviour within and outside the classroom (Holliday, 1996).

[2] It is important to note that these TESEP institutions exist not only in the developing world, but everywhere. In Britain they have a complex relationship with BANA practice in university language education (Holliday, forthcoming).

[3] Setting the size of a 'small' class at 20 is a very rough estimate. Numbers close to this are institutionally set as the maximum in many private language schools in Britain. However, the reader who is interested in exploring this issue further may start with Coleman's (1989) discussion of perceptions of class size.

[4] By 'local' I mean belonging to the country, and in some cases to the locality. Although I dislike the term because it implies something away from the norm, I use 'non-native speaker' because it is in the dominant discourse. 'Monolingual'

is used with caution considering that in the class(es) in India there may be students with different 'mother' or 'first' languages, but who would *almost* always be able to use another common language than English.

[5] Other categories, setting up and materials, also exist in the notes, but have not been included because they are not relevant to this analysis.

[6] In Holliday (1991) there is a further 'participant' category for 'students'. In this study, the attributes of each group of students are not focused upon. This is due mainly to lack of researcher knowledge within the time limitations of each event.

[7] It is, however, unavoidable that some of the labels will signify values of different kinds to different readers depending on their own ideological points of view. For example, Formal and Translation will carry a negative, and Groups a positive, connotation to some advocates of the popular view of communicative language teaching. At the same time, these same labels may carry neutral or opposite value to readers with other viewpoints.

[8] In the case of the Chinese lessons, British 'experts' had been involved in the writing of the textbooks and the 'development' of some of the lecturers who would use them. In the case of the Indian lessons, although the writers were largely Indian it could be argued that many of their ideas come from American or British universities.

[9] There must be a point at which the class size and layout becomes so limiting as to make teaching and learning difficult. See, for example, Mebo's (1995) comparison of student coping behaviour of large and very large classes in Kenya.

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