Beyond RASHOMON–Conceptualizing and Describing the Teaching Act

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When teachers, supervisors, employers, students or salespeople discuss the same lessons, texts, tests, methods and schools of language teaching, they often sound like the characters in the Japanese movie, Rashomon—they each give contradictory and equivocal accounts of the same events or items. To classify the communications people send and receive in both teaching and non-teaching settings so that we can move beyond Rashomon, and give similar accounts of the same events, an instrument has been developed called FOCUS, an acronym for Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings. The language of FOCUS is technical: composed of operationally defined terms that are non-judgmental.

One purpose of the article is to teach the five characteristics of communications that are noted with FOCUS, provide a rationale for each and suggest applications of the instrument for teachers, teacher trainers, supervisors and researchers. Another purpose is to argue that the teaching act is not a mystery that defies precise and rational description and that we can learn a great deal about how to teach by analyzing descriptions that show how practicing teachers and their students communicate both in the classroom and outside the classroom at parties, on the job and at home.

In The Silent Language, Edward Hall describes three types of learning: formal, informal and technical (1959). Formal instruction is prescriptive, outlining what should and should not be done and judging the degree of approximation to a model. Informal instruction depends on models presented for imitation. Technical instruction depends on an explicit description and classification of what is to be learned, conveyed in a vocabulary of operationally defined terms; it is non-judgmental.

To illustrate these three types of learning, Hall uses the example of skiing. In a village where all have to ski to get around, children learn to ski mainly by watching their parents—informal learning. Weekend skiers in the same village learn mainly by being admonished with judgments and prescriptions as they ski—formal learning. One learns skiing technically through explicit labels. These labels are based on a description, classification and analysis of the patterned behaviors of skiers and are nonjudgmental. Though all three types of learning exist in various proportions in all learning situations, formal and informal learning dominate the practica in the pre-service and in-service education of most second language teachers. Some programs are entirely formal, relying solely on injunction. In other programs, judgments and prescriptions (formal) are presented along with

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demonstration lessons or micro lessons (informal). We have all heard these admonitions: "Your pace was good, but you have to be more attentive to those in the back" or "I think my voice sounds odd, and I have to get some of that weight off" or "Be sure not to ever write an error on the blackboard, but give a lot of praise." The philosophy of many teacher educators, supervisors and employers seems to be that teachers will get the hang of teaching if they teach, look at enough classes and listen to enough admonitions.

Few seem to believe that teachers will get the hang of linguistics. Perhaps this is why technical teaching in most second language teacher education programs has for the most part been reserved for various aspects of linguistics, the technical language used to describe the content second language teachers are expected to teach. Thus, most second language teachers have been exposed to the technical language of phonology, morphology, and syntax and some even know the technical language of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The terms used in these technical languages have precise meanings that receive wide consent.

No technical language exists to designate the teaching behavior in second language learning settings. The vocabulary used to discuss language teaching, textbooks and tests is composed of such words as drill, reinforcement, mechanical, communicate, pace, audio-lingual, situational reinforcement, words that are ill-defined and inconsistently used. We have phonemes and morphemes but no teachemes.[1]

The lack of a technical language to discuss the informal teaching done in demonstration lessons and micro-teaching and the formal teaching that occurs when we judge and critique a lesson we have seen leads to a situation analogous to one in the Japanese movie Rashomon, where four people give contradictory and equivocal accounts and interpretations of an event they have all witnessed. Like the characters in the movie, second language teachers and supervisors, when pressed to defend their accounts, interpretations, and judgments after a lesson, highlight behaviors, exercises, and communications that support their point of view, even though such items may be infrequent and even incidental to the central event.

Without a common unit of analysis or operationally defined words that are part of an overall shared concept, each viewer is bound to see events through his own perceptions and preconceived notions. Consequently, the words he uses to describe each teaching act will often have meanings that do not coincide with the meanings attached to them by another viewer.

As a result, technical instruction is impossible, and these types of discussion can lead to little more than the advocacy of one particular theory over another or to the superiority of one type of exercise over another. Without technical language one cannot develop a description of what teachers and students actually do, compare lessons, methods or different "schools"

[1] I first heard this term from Professor Austerlitz, Department of Linguistics, Columbia University, during a discussion of my research on the teaching act.

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of language teaching or see the relationship between what was done and the teacher's intentions. Nor can one see the extent to which classroom behaviors reflect a theory of language teaching or measure the effect on learning of particular communications.

In my view, we need a technical language for the teaching act[2] equal to the technical language used to teach content. To this end, I have developed a conceptual framework and set of terms for classifying, creating and evaluating communications in a range of settings. This system is called FOCUS, an acronym for F oci for O bserving C ommunications U sed in S ettings. In this system, communicatins both inside and outside of the classroom are seen as a series of patterned events in which two or more people use mediums such as speech, gestures, noise, or writing to evaluate, interpret and in other ways communicate separate areas of content such as the meaning of words, personal feelings, or classroom procedure, for one of four pedagogical purposes: structuring, soliciting, responding, and reacting. Therefore, FOCUS distinguishes five characteristics of communications: the source, the medium, the use, the content and the pedagogical purpose.

Though I do not have a technical language to code the settings in which communications are made I do note the setting and some details of it since the setting has such a strong effect on determining patterns of characteristics of communications. A bar produces patterns impossible in most teaching settings, and a confessional calls forth communications that could never be made in a toll booth. The word setting in the acronym FOCUS highlights the importance of noting the setting in which communications take place.

I note the pedagogical purpose of communications in FOCUS because this characteristic determines the basic unit of analysis, the move (Bellack, et al., 1966). Communications that set the stage for subsequent behavior and exercises or self-directed activities such as reading silently or cleaning up a classroom on one's own without being told are structuring moves. Those communications that set tasks or ask questions are considered soliciting moves. Performances of set tasks and answers to questions are responding moves. Communications that modify previous moves, rate them

or are called forth by previous moves are reacting moves. Both context and source are crucial in determining move boundaries and move types.

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Names of schools of language teaching, types of skills developed and names of techniques and methods have been used as basic units of analysis in previous discussions of language teaching. Thus, one hears of the audio-lingual methods as opposed to the silent way, situational reinforce-

2 The term "teaching act" must be broader when discussing language teaching than when discussing other types of teaching. Studying the teaching act of the language teacher must include study of how we communicate in non-teaching settings as well as teaching settings since part of our job is to teach our students how to communicate outside of the classroom, in non-teaching settings.

3 For a guide to learning the moves see Carol Rubin, Self-Instructional Materials for Learning Bellack's Moves.

ment and its similarity to the direct method or the relationship between grammar-translation and counselling-learning. In some discussions the interaction between the development of one of the four traditional skills and favorite techniques or methods receives attention. One hears how helpful games can be in the development of reading skills, the utility of songs in developing speaking skills and the advantages of dialogs in fostering face to face language skills, etc.

Using such large units for analysis—the school, the skill, the method— can obscure a great deal. Three teachers may consider themselves members of School 1, practitioners of Method A and believers in the need to develop oral skills before any others. Yet, one teacher shakes students' hands after many correct responses; another never comments about student performance. A third comments only after a good student's response and does not react to poor students at all, whether their responses are correct or incorrect. In addition, one of the three teachers who believes in the same school periodically explains the rationale for the method used at the beginning of a class while the other two never do; they begin each class with greetings and personal remarks. Since teachers of the same school may use different behaviors, a smaller unit of analysis than the school is necessary. And if either the preparation for the setting of tasks or feedback have any effect on learning it make sense to use structuring and reacting moves as basic units of analysis rather than schools, skills or types of methods. Since tasks are set and performed or questions are asked and answered in classes no matter what school, method or skill is supportedly involved, it makes sense to use soliciting and responding moves as basic units of analysis as well.

Though the move is defined as a combination having one of four pedagogical purposes it can be used to classify communications in non-teaching settings as well, since we ask and answer questions, comment on what others do and perform self-directed activities in all settings. Thus, we can employ the same basic unit to classify communications both inside and outside of classrooms. As a result, precise comparisons can be made between teaching and non-teaching settings. Since the move has been used in scores of studies of classes other than those in which language is taught, comparisons between patterns of moves in history, science, math and second language classes can also be made.

Categories developed in studies of the functions of language have not been used as the basic unit of analysis both because they usually refer to a series of communications and because deciding between them requires more inference than deciding between move types. Halliday's classification of the purposes for which we communicate, for example, is helpful in interpreting data discovered by analyzing the characteristics we note (1973). But the categories do not allow for as precise a tabulation as we are interested in.

Simply making tallies of the pedagogical purposes of communications is not as instructive as tallying the source of each communication along

with the purpose. In the latter, we can tell the proportion of moves made by each person in a setting. One believer in Method A may make 100% of the soliciting moves in the class; another may encourage student solicits.

If half of the reacting moves are performed by students in one class and only a few in another class this difference in source must be shown. When the solicit "Shut up!" is made by a student to a teacher it has a very different meaning than when made by the teacher to a student. Precise descriptions of these distinctions are not possible using the usual units of analysis such as the school, method or skill.

The boxes in the two columns below are just like items in a substitution table; any box in Column 1 can combine with any box in Column 2.

Two Characteristics of

Column 1 Source*

Column 1 Source*

Who communicates?

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Column 2 Move Type

Column 2 Move Type

What is the pedagogical purpose
of the communication?

* In a non-teaching setting, the sources would of course be different; any abbreviations can be used. On a quiz show an m could be used for the master of ceremonies and a g for guests; in a sandbox c_1 could stand for one child and c_2 for another.

Using the boxes to note these two characteristics of communication in a conversation has often revealed a pattern of two sources reacting about an equal number of times in my observations. However, in some conversations one source structures constantly and the other person only has a chance to react. In a classroom, the teacher structures, solicits and reacts while the students only respond, while in a tutoring session and in group work in classrooms the students also solicit and react. Of course in a classroom setting without discipline students also react and solicit. The setting in which communications take place has a great effect on determining the patterns of sources and moves. Thus, altering the settings in which language instruction takes place can itself radically change the pattern of behavior that goes on. And altering the patterns of these two characteristics of communication in a class, at a cocktail party or in any other setting will greatly alter the nature of interaction in these settings.

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Of course, two classes may show a very similar frequency, sequence and combination of moves and sources and yet be very different. Three teachers may each communicate 200 soliciting moves by setting 200 tasks or asking 200 questions. But if the solicit in one class requires the oral repetition of a word, in another the copying of copying of a word from the blackboard and in still another the phonetic transcription of words, these differences must be noted. Therefore, with FOCUS, in addition to noting the source and pedagogical purpose of communications we note the mediums the moves contain.

Though some might object to McLuhan's famous dictum that the medium is the message, most would agree that a major difference betweeen many communications is that the messages are communicated in different mediums. Showing a picture of an avocado, holding up a real avocado, writing the word avocado in phonetic script or uttering avocado in soliciting moves all may bring an image of a pear shaped food into the minds of those who know the object and its name. But the transcribed words bring no image to the mind of those unfamiliar with phonetic script. And the real avocado may communicate something of the texture and actual size of the avocado in a way the picture does not. In the same way, one may wish to present one's personal displeasure in a reacting move with a comment, a grunt or an agonized look. The comment would communicate displeasure only if the audience understood the words, and the agonized look would communicate only if it were seen. Edmund Carpenter contends that Mendel's theories of genetics were ignored for thirty-five years because they were presented originally in print without visual illustrations (1974). Thus, in FOCUS one reason I note the type of medium is because I assume that different mediums communicating the same content provide different kinds and amounts of information.

I also note the type of medium used because a great range of mediums is used frequently both in teaching and non-teaching settings. When a teacher reacts to an error in tense by putting his right thumb up over his shoulder as if he were hitching a ride and a student reacts by saying "Oh, past!" gesture and speech are both used. Likewise, in a non-teaching setting, a flower given to one's date before dinner communicates just as "How are you?" does. It seems unreasonable to note and classify communications made in speech and ignore those made with other types of mediums such as gestures and flowers.

Noting mediums in moves also provides insight into how messages are communicated. The solicit, "Pick up the book," can mean either "Please pick up the book; nothing is wrong; we just want the book on the desk" or "Pick up the book; you are clumsy; you should not have dropped it" depending on the tone of voice used. In FOCUS, the tone of voice and spoken words are considered two separate mediums. In "Pick up the book" the words are the same whether one is being neutral or showing displeasure. The tone of voice communicates an extra message. People make

evaluations with their tone of voice, their looks and their movements even though the words they utter may simply be stating a fact or giving a command. "It's not what he said, but how he said it that bothered me" and "Her words said 'no' while her eyes said 'yes'" are two familiar communications that reflect the crucial importance of examining more than the medium of the spoken word alone.

For ease of discussion, the mediums used to communicate content in moves are categorized as linguistic, non-linguistic and para-linguistic. Communications expressed with words, produced by the vocal cords and tongue. or written representations of such communications, constitute linguistic mediums. Communications that are made with instruments or with parts of the body used as an instrument and things made from tools or produced artistically, mechanically, or naturally such as pictures, objects and music are classified non-linguistic. Communications expressed by the body without vocal cords and tongue such as gestures, movement and touch constitute para-linguistic mediums, referred to by some as body language.

On a lower level of analysis, these three major categories are further split into three sub-categories. Mediums that appeal primarily to the ear such as spoken words, intonation, noise, music, and laughing are coded as aural. Those that appeal primarily to the eye such as printed words, phonetic transcriptions, pictures, diagrams, and gestures are coded as visual. Those that appeal to more than one sense or other senses such as touching, distance, dancing, movement, and clothing are classified "other." Looking at a video tape with the sound off clearly highlights the visual mediums. Listening to an audio recording of conversations or a teaching session clearly highlights aural mediums. Categories of the mediums along with examples are shown in the Tables in Appendix I.

This categorization of mediums is more helpful than a two-way division between verbal and non-verbal seen in much of the literature because this classification allows us to show differences between mediums that are critical in second language settings. We usually do not teach students to draw in language class yet we do teach them gestures. If we did not separate non-linguistic from para-linguistic we would code a class learning gestures and a class learning to draw in the same way since both drawing and gesturing would be considered non-verbal. It is important to show whether students are learning how to communicate with linguistic mediums such as words, para-linguistic mediums such as body language or non-linguistic mediums such as drawings. It is also important to distinguish between aural mediums such as spoken words, music, tone of voice and visual mediums such as print, drawings, and maps because these distinctions show us whether students are developing receptive or productive skills.

Our substitution table now has three columns. The four move types now interact not only with the six major sources but also with the three major categories of mediums and three sub-categories of each. Noting the mediums used in moves by different sources greatly expands the power of FOCUS. Six sources combining with four move types may produce at least

twenty-four distinct groupings. When six sources combine with four move types and three categories of mediums many more distinct combinations are possible. Within each category of medium there are three sub-categories: aural, written, and other, and in each at least ten separate types of mediums are possible. The number of permutations possible when noting just these three characteristics is thus extremely large.

Attention to the mediums used to communicate moves not only reveals a great deal about how different people communicate; it also reveals a great number of moves that would not ordinarily be noticed because they are communicated in mediums we frequently fail to note, such as distance, movement, background noise and other non-linguistic and para-linguistic mediums that appear in some cases to the eyes and ears and in other cases to senses other than the eyes or ears such as touch and feeling.

Similar patterns of sources, moves and mediums in separate lessons do not mean the lessons are the same. A lesson on tense, intonation, adjective word order, the classification of snakes or students' views on religion will develop mastery of different areas of content. Teacher and student moves that communicate personal feelings must be coded differently from moves that communicate the theme of Last Tango in Paris or procedures for a fire drill. Likewise, at a party the topic of a conversation might be personal feelings about a film or a description of the way the film was made. Therefore, with FOCUS, in addition to noting the source, pedagogical purpose, and mediums I note the content the moves contain.

I employ four major categories of content. If some aspect of the target language is being communicated as an area of study—as information set apart and being studied, tested, or practiced—the content is labeled language. The content in the solicit "Give me a match" would be considered language if it were communicated to test one's understanding of the words give or match or to practice the pronunciation of the final sound in match for example. Language is divided into subcategories representing seven systems developed in second language classes: contextual, grammatical, literary, meaning, mechanics of writing, sound, speech production. Categories of content along with examples are shown in the Tables in Appendix I.

If one said "Give me a match" because one really needed to light a cigar, the content would be coded life. Expressing formulas such as greetings, reflections from the imagination, personal feelings or personal information or general knowledge such as historical dates, prices of cars or issues such as inflation are all examples of communications that would be considered to have content of life.

The third category of content, procedure, is employed when mediums are used to communicate information in one of these sub-categories: administration, classroom social behavior, language teaching procedure, teaching and learning rationale. The calling of the roll, disciplining of students, directions to manipulate language, explanations of the reasons particular exercises are being done are all examples of communications that would be classified procedure.

When mediums communicate information that cannot be classified as language, life or procedure the content is coded subject matter, the fourth category of content. Thus if anyone communicates a skill such as knitting, wine tasting, bridge, or cooking or a school subject such as history, biology or mathematics or a survival skill such as how to cash a check or read a lease, the content is classified as subject matter.

For decades, language teachers have been saying that if history teachers and science teachers do not help teach language the students will suffer. During the same decades, many language teachers in Africa and perhaps other areas were saying that the way to teach language was to teach history, science, crafts and other subjects in the target language. Language was therefore not limited to the language classroom nor were the other subjects limited to particular subject matter classes; language and subject matter in the same language were taught hand in hand. Today, this idea is being applied in some classes in the United States and being discussed under the label Language for Special or Specific Purposes. The category

subject matter is designed to show teaching of this type.

Each category has sub-categories and each sub-category divisions. The level of category of content one employs depends on the needs one has. If one wants to compare a number of settings to see the extent to which each category is communicated, then only the four major categories need be used. If one is interested in determining the areas of language most frequently communicated in a series of lessons, then the sub-categories shown in the Tables in Appendix I would be employed. If the entire lesson is devoted to a sub-category such as the sound system, then the divisions of the sound system would be called for. In this case, either the usual linguistic divisions of the sound system could be employed or those listed in the Tables in Appendix I.

A central characteristic noted with FOCUS is the use. The use shows how the mediums are used to communicate content. To determine the category of use, the first question is whether the mediums communicate any content. In receptive activities such as silent reading, listening exercises, feeling, tasting or smelling things to sense their texture, flavor or scent, a person is trying to make sense out of content another person communicated; the receiver is not communicating content; the sender is. These receptive activities are coded attend (1).

To distinguish between different categories of productive activities we first ask whether the mediums communicate comments about content or content iteself. When speech, print, pictures or other mediums are used to comment on something else we code the communications characterize (2). If speech, print, pictures or other mediums are used to present content itself rather than a comment on content or an item, we code the communication present (3). In a game of bridge, a player can bid "one heart," "one spade" or "two clubs"; since these statements do not literally mean he has one heart, one spade or two clubs but rather are labels indicating an approximate number of points and number of hearts, spades or clubs, the player is com-

municating a message about his hand; therefore, these communications would be coded characterize (2). If a player were allowed to say "I have five hearts: the ace, queen, jack, ten and nine, etc." rather than the label "one heart" he would be communicating messages that would be coded present (3). Activities such as indicating whether communications are the same or different, incorrect or correct or true or false, defining words by giving their attributes, indicating how many syllables a word has or giving categorical labels are all coded characterize (2). Giving directions and asking questions, identifying objects, giving atonyms and synonyms, reading orally, writing dictations, and communicating content of life or subject matter directly are all coded present (3). This distinction has of course been made by others. Most recently, Smith, in a discussion of cognitive interrelations, makes the distinction. The category present (3) represents what he calls an "is ('izza') relationship" (1975: 21). An example would be "Fred is a teacher." The category characterize (2) represents what he discusses as a "has" relationship or an "is" relationship without the "a." Examples would be "Fred has long hair" and "Fred is young."

If the communications do not fit into the categories attend (1), characterize (2), or present (3), we ask whether the communications give an explanation or make an inference. If they do, we code the communications relate (4). Generalizations, giving reasons for behavior, speculating, and making inferences are activities that are coded relate (4). As Long has shown, further classification of this type of communication can be useful (Long et al., 1976).

If the communications do not fit any of these four categories, we assume speech, print, etc. are simply being used to re-present communications another has made in the same medium. If they are used in this way we code them re-present (5). Copying, imitating, paraphrasing, making substitutions in sentences, and changing the word order in sentences are all examples of the category re-present (5). Detailed definitions of these major categories of use as well as the sub-categories, together with examples, are presented in Appendix I and II.

This categorization of uses means that in my conceptualization there are

basically only five major kinds of structuring, soliciting, responding and reacting moves possible. Variation in these major kinds of structuring, soliciting, responding and reacting moves comes either from their source, alteration in the mediums and content or in the information given in the surrounding moves. Thus, Class 1 and Class 2 may both respond with the use present 80% of the time. But in Class 1, the medium used in the responses is print while in Class 2 it is speech. And in Class 1, the content is language while in Class 2 it is life. Furthermore, the solicits in Class 1 are communicated with realia while in Class 2 they are presented with speech. The reactions in both Class 1 and Class 2 are all the sub-category of the use characterize called evaluate. But in Class 1 the evaluations are communicated with gestures while in Class 2 the teacher shakes students' hands so the medium is touch. Finally, when errors are made in Class 1 the teacher

consistently uses the sub-category of characterize called label in solicits that follow the error, e.g., "Use the past tense." In Class 2, the teacher never uses the category label after errors, simply saying "Again," but students say the answers. Therefore, the information given after incorrect responses is very different in both classes. In fact, one reason that so many comparison of methods studies have not found many differences in learning in classes exposed to different methods may be simply because the supposedly different methods in fact required the same types of responses from students. Students supposedly exposed to different methods may have been doing mostly the same types of things; and students supposedly exposed to the same method may have been doing different things.

Heretofore, this categorization has not been employed to describe and compare communications in classrooms and other settings. Rather, communications have been called mechanical, meaningful, skill getting, pseudo-communicative, communicative, etc. These distinctions fail to take into account different mental operations demanded by different communications. Saying a word has three syllables, or is a noun, or is different from another word, or is incorrect, or giving it a definition or stating a rule, or inferring or recalling or repeating—all require different mental operations.

Two groups—one in a bar and another in a classroom—may spend hours exchanging data about a sport using gestures, laughing, and passing score cards around—extremely communicative activity! But if one group is using metaphors to describe some team members, making generalizations about why the team is so active, evaluating each other's generalizations and classifying the attributes of each player, and the other group is simply describing the games they have seen, the communicative activity in each group is very different. It seems as important to note that the participants in each group are using mediums in vastly different ways that reflect different mental operations as to note that the communications in both groups are meaningful or communicative.

Words such as mechanical, meaningful, etc. not only fail to account for different types of mental operations, they also require a high degree of inference. Many are similar to items in rating scales that contain comments such as these: conversation was interesting; teacher was well prepared; teacher achieved goal. Each person's interpretation of interesting or meaningful is different. Because a technical language such as FOCUS has operationally defined terms it does not require the high degree of inference that words such as meaningful do. Without the use of technical terms, descriptions of communications in and out of classes will invariably include global, imprecise language requiring high inference and leading to varying and often contradictory versions of the same events.

In addition to requiring high inference, words such as meaningful and interesting are loaded; the words themselves have good and bad connotations. If asked to choose, most would no doubt like to teach a class or participate in a conversation that was meaningful and interesting rather than meaningless or uninteresting. Words such as meaningful and interesting are in them-

selves judgmental as well as descriptive. Judgments mean someone's ego is involved, and this can interfere with perception. At the conclusion of a conference on teacher education, a participant related St. Paul's comment

on self-perception to the use of a technical language in teacher education. . . . St. Paul said, "Ye shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass, for he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was." This is what happened to these student teachers. They saw themselves on television teaching . . . saw what little they did right. Then, they turned the projector off and they went back to the classroom, and whatever they did had nothing to do with what they saw of themselves, as they did not know how to perceive themselves. A language of teacher behavior provides a vocabulary for self-perception for the teacher (Burkhart 1969: 63).

A recent book on tennis contains the same theme: Step 1 in learning is to "observe nonjudgmentally, existing behavior . . . awareness of what is, without judgment . . . is the best precondition for change" (Gallwey 1974: 80).

The use of high inference words that themselves are judgmental is a characteristic of formal instruction. While formal instruction contributes to the Rashomon effect technical instruction moves beyond the Rashomon effect. In technical instruction the "headsets," egos and preoccupations of the participant/observers filter perception much less; and contradictory versions of the same event, caused in part by the use of terms requiring high inference, are decreased. While interpretations and evaluations of the effects of events may still differ after a description in which technical terms are used, at least the participants will be discussing the events themselves with precise operationally defined terms that are not judgmental.

The basic elements of FOCUS are shown below in Table 1. Though the number of characteristics of communication noted with FOCUS is only five—source, pedagogical purpose, medium, use, content—and the number of major categories of each characteristic is always less than six—just as 103 chemical elements combine to form thousands of compounds, the 12 tone system can produce jazz, rock and roll or classical music, and the differences in the point and manner of articulation can describe most sounds—a cross-categorization of the categories of characteristics noted with FOCUS can be used to describe the exciting variety of communications both in second language learning settings and elsewhere. Different frequencies, combinations and sequences of the basic elements of FOCUS can clearly illustrate both similarities and differences of communications made by two children in a sandbox, two teachers presenting the same lesson in Lado English, two students being taught by a tape recorder, two history teachers teaching in Hungarian, and most other combinations of settings, sources and targets one could conjure up.

This conceptualization and these labels can be employed both in lesson planning and research at many levels. For example, a teacher might decide to see the extent to which the students understand polite and impolite I

TABLE 1 FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATIONS IN SETTINGS

1. Who communicates? the communication?* cation?*	2. What is the pedagogical purpose of content?	3. What mediums are used to communicate areas	4. How are the mediums used to communicate areas cated?* *	5. What areas of content are communicated?**

* These four pedagogical purposes are from Bellack.
** The uses and areas of content are presented alphabetically rather than in any hierarchical order.

gestures. To meet this aim, the teacher could include solicits in a lesson plan which required students to respond using gestures to present content in the sub-category of language called the contextual system. Or, the teacher could perform the gestures in his solicits and require the students to characterize them by using speech to evaluate them in their responses.

As a research instrument, FOCUS can be employed to analyze communications on many different levels and with varying degrees of compre-

pensiveness. It is a simple matter to listen to a tape of a lesson and compare it with the plan one has made. But tallying need not be tied to lesson plans. To note one or two characteristics of communications as they occur, check-

lists can easily be constructed. One might want to tally the mediums students use in class before the lesson begins and during the lesson. One may want to compare patterns of moves in teaching settings and non-teaching settings, the mediums students are required to use during class and those required on examinations, the areas of content covered daily and those completely ignored. More comprehensive coding can be done by transcribing communications and coding all five characteristics; Appendix II contains a sample of this type of coding with excerpts from two settings: a classroom and an airport.

At first, perception of what has been seen is clarified simply by using categories from the instrument to label characteristics of communications and tally them. Similarities and differences can be highlighted between different "schools" of language teaching, between practitioners of different methods, between communications in teaching settings and non-teaching settings, and between teachers with different kinds and amounts of training and experience. As communications in separate lessons are classified and counted, questions about relationships between communications in each class can be asked. "'What mediums, uses and areas of content do so-called eclectic teachers employ in reactions to error in contrast to audio-lingual teachers, silent-way teachers and those without training who correct others in science classes or during ordinary conversations on the street?" "What is the content of student reactions in a class in which the teacher constantly speaks about personal matters?" "What type of reactions and responses occur in classes where teachers communicate a great number of moves with content of procedure?" "What uses occur in classes where teachers employ group work and a great deal of realia in contrast to classes in which no groups or realia are used?" These are only a few of the questions about relationships that can be asked. As these types of relationships become clearer, the effects different patterns of communication have on learning may begin to emerge. In fact, one central purpose of all of this systematic description is to begin to identify consistent relationships between characteristics of communications so that we can begin to base our teaching on evidence of effectiveness plus theory rather than on theory alone or one's whims.[4]

Without a conceptual framework to which we may attach our descriptions of teacher-learner behaviors, we cannot as clearly discern the relationship between pedagogical intention and learning response. Nor can we adequately integrate desired modifications into our teaching. Suggestions from others, detailed notes in lesson plans, specific behaviors to be employed, patterns of communications in teaching and non-teaching settings—all can be better

[4] For those who are totally repelled by this idea of classifying and quantifying such a human activity as teaching in this way, I suggest you read Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. The author's discussion of the school of reason and the romantic school provide insight into the problem of classifying and quantifying.

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understood, remembered, and mastered when placed within the board conceptual framework provided by FOCUS.

The Competency Based Teacher Education Movement encourages the type of precise, systematic, and non-judgmental study of the teaching act and its effects that FOCUS can provide. The CBTE movement believes that if teachers can see the range of teacher behaviors possible, use the behaviors consciously and measure their effects on learning, teachers may expand the repertoire of their behaviors (Elam 1971). Study after study has shown the limited range of teacher behaviors both in subject matter classes (Bellack et al., 1966; Flanders 1970; Hoetker and Ahlbrand 1969) and in second language classes (Fanselow 1976; Gamta 1976; Long 1976; Moskowitz 1976; Naiman et al., 1975; Rwakyaka 1976). Since another tenet of CBTE requires that teacher trainers must study the degree to which the training program they execute aids in the expansion of teacher behaviors (Elam 1971), future research studies should be able to tell us the extent to which the use of technical instruction in the teaching act alters what almost seems to have become a ritual for many teachers.

For too long, we have sought technical information only from psychologists, linguists and researchers who did comparison of methods studies. Or we have sought formal and informal instruction from authors of methods

books, advocates of particular "schools" or sets of tests or materials. To be sure, these sources have been helpful and ought not to be discarded. They can be supplemented, however, by instruments such as FOCUS which (1) permit us to develop technical information about what we practicing language teachers and our students actually do both in classrooms and other settings,[5] (2) help us examine the effects different communications have on learning; and (3) enable us to translate the suggestions and theories from linguists, advocates of particular theories and others into precise objectives.

Just as observing and playing a game of chess is more valuable if one understands that the game is limited to various combinations of moves of 32 chess pieces in distinct ways over 64 squares, and just as a physical examination makes more sense if the doctor does it with a conceptual framework and with technical terms based on a classification his colleagues share, so observing of teaching in second language classes and other settings is more valuable if it is seen conceptually and is discussed with operationally defined terms.

Developments in teaching, as in any field, come from those who have conceptualized their discipline and possess shared terms to describe their craft. Conceptualization strengthens the basic elements and combines them in new ways, thereby increasing control and expanding options. Teachers and

[5] In a recent paper at UNESCO, Christina Bratt Paulston discussed "recent developments in language teaching in the United States." At the conclusion of her description she admitted that her view was based on her own work at the University of Pittsburgh, "not the assessment of actual teaching in the country (19) ." In fact, most reviews of language teaching are based on what is read in journals and printed in books, not what teachers actually do. Moskowitz's recent description (1976) is the exception rather than the rule.

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students who, through heightened understanding, can create new combinations of sources, pedagogical purposes, mediums, uses, and areas of content will produce totally different and more varied patterns of communications in a range of settings. Much like chess masters, poets, artists, or scientists who have created new and original patterns in their respective fields because they have attached intricacy of detail to simplicity of concept, teachers, too, may now seek the creative, innovative and effective, confident that the teaching act is no longer a mystery that defies precise and rational control.

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