A Comparison of Classroom Discourse and Casual Conversation

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1.　Introduction

Speech events can be classified by genre, according to the contexts and situations in which they take place (Coulthard, 1985: 42). All genres have a style, understood by examining the conditions under which they operate. Hymes (1986) sets out seven parameters for exploring speech events. This paper examines two speech events according to these parameters; a classroom presentation activity between the author and his student, and a casual conversation between the same participants. It is shown that constraints within these parameters affect the discourse; the greater the constraints, the more distinctive the discourse features. Each parameter is applied to the speech events in turn, and the key features summarised. A judgement is made as to which discourse type has the most identifiable features, and the reasons for this. Understanding these differences could help teachers re-assess classroom language teaching and learner readiness for real-world second language use.

2.　Using Hymes' framework to summarise the discourse features

2.1　Setting

Speech events occur within a particular time, place and psychological scene (Hymes, 1986: 60) and these aspects influence stylistic mode and structure (Coulthard, 1985: 44). A Christmas Catholic mass typically takes place on Christmas Eve and in a church, and is understood to be a formal occasion. The hushed tones of the worshippers and formal/ritualised language are consequences of this setting. This section summarises how setting influences classroom and casual discourse.

Setting of the classroom discourse

The lesson participants are a Japanese male student studying intermediate English, and the author. The location is the student's company, every Tuesday between 2pm and 3pm, in the same meeting room. The data were taken from their fourth lesson, when lesson procedures were established (figure 1).

1. Greet and small talk
2. Check homework
3. Introduce chapter topic
4. Agree a lesson goal

5. Present key language
6. Practice key language
7. Performance related to lesson goal
8. Feedback and re-enact performance

9. Set homework
10. End lesson

Figure 1: Lesson procedure

Figure 2 shows the classroom layout. Teaching aids are positioned in close proximity to the teacher for his use. The student is sat opposite the teacher, a position corresponding to the centre front area of a traditional classroom. Attention is focused on the teacher.
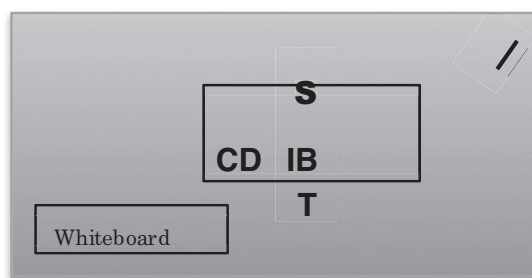

Figure 2: Classroom layout (S=student, T=teacher, IB =illustration book)

This is a familiar, formal psychological setting for the Japanese learner, in whose educational culture teacher-centred classes are the norm (Hofstede, 1986: 313; Burrows, 2008: 96). The following sections examine how these features of setting affect the structure of the discourse.

Sinclair and Coulthard's model

In Sinclair and Coulthard's model (1975), transactions in classroom discourse are realised by two types of exchange: Boundary and Teaching (1975: 25). Boundary exchanges are realised by framing and/ or focusing moves. Teaching exchanges, which have four functions (*informing, directing, eliciting and checking*) are realised by combinations of opening, answering and follow-up moves, a three move pattern labelled Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) (1975: 26).

Boundary exchanges in the classroom discourse

The organisation of lesson procedures and content occurs through boundary exchanges, which signal transitions from one transaction to the next (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975: 25). Figure 3 shows two such

boundary exchanges (3 and 4), as the transition is made from one transaction (negotiating the lesson goal) to a new transaction (the presentation activity). *Frames* (characterised by marked intonation and followed by a silent stress) demarcate the discourse. In the first boundary exchange (3) a *focusing* move clarifies the next stage and signals the successful conclusion of the transaction.

	Transcript	Class of move
1	T: What would you prefer to do, er, telephone or an e-mail?	Opening
	S: E-mail is easier.	Answering
	T: Yeah.	Follow-up
2	S: Mmm…so the phone is difficult to listen.	Opening
	T: Ah ok	Answering
3	T: Well ∧	Framing
	T: maybe we'll do both, we've got time, we might…let's say our goal is to er arrange a meeting (teacher writes on whiteboard)… over the phone…and by e-mail …making an appointment.	Focusing
	S: Over the phone.	Answering
4	T: So (teacher opens textbook) ∧	Framing
5	T: let's look in the book. This is er unit fourteen.	Opening

Figure 3: Boundary exchanges (teaching discourse) (∧ pause)

Setting of the casual conversation

At this point the lesson has officially ended, in terms of allotted time and completion of procedures. The conversation exists outside of the official lesson; it is spontaneous and superfluous.

Figure 4 shows the setting; most of the classroom aids have been removed. The positioning and proximity of teacher and student resembles an everyday encounter. Emptied of pedagogical signifiers, the psychological setting becomes informal as the participant roles revert to that of employee-visitor. The following section examines boundary exchanges in this discourse.
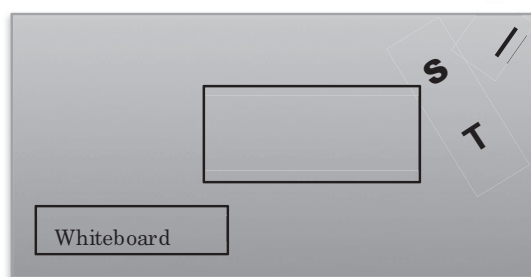

Figure 4: Physical setting (casual conversation)

Boundary exchanges in the casual conversation

Figure 5 shows data from the casual conversation. In line 11 the student uses the marker *so* to signal a boundary in the talk. However, such organising moves are fewer and less explicit than those found in the classroom discourse. Furthermore, framing moves are unaccompanied by focusing moves.

	Transcript
1	T: How far is it to Kochi?
2	S: Kochi?
3	T: Yeah.
4	S: About four hundred kilometres from here.
5	T: Okay.
6	S: It takes five hours by car.
7	T: You driving?
8	S: Yeah.
9	T: Does it snow? Lots of snow?
10	S: Ah no no. Kochi is er warm.
11	S: So. How about you?
12	T: Er I'm going to Kumamoto.
13	S: Oh Kumamoto?

Figure 5: Boundary exchanges (casual conversation)

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The classroom discourse has clearly identifiable boundary exchanges while the casual conversation displays less explicit organising behaviours. This can be explained in part by the settings. Firstly, the casual discourse is not subject to temporal demands, meaning the impulse to organise the talk is diminished. Secondly, physical and psychological elements of setting no longer support teacher dominance. A more symmetrical relationship results, where explicit organisation of the discourse is neither necessary nor appropriate.

2.2 Participants

Hymes identifies at least four participant roles: *addressor, speaker, addressee* and *hearer/audience* (1986: 60). While an *addressor* is the author of the message being conveyed, a *speaker* may be a spokesperson for someone else's ideas or message. The *addressee* is the ratified hearer, while the *hearer/audience* 'in some sense overhears' (Coulthard, 1985: 47). The following section identifies participant roles in the data, and their influence on discourse structure.

Participant roles in the classroom discourse

Figure 6 shows data from the presentation activity. An illustration book was used to introduce topic-related vocabulary, priming the student for a listening activity.

	Transcript	Role	Notes
1	T: Is it formal or casual do you think?	Speaker?	
2	S: Er. Formal.	Speaker	Repeating the teacher
3	T: Yeah maybe.	Addressor	
4	S: Maybe formal.	Speaker	Repeating the teacher
5	T: So er what does he want? Does he want to meet in her office or meet somewhere else?	Speaker?	
6	S: Er. He want to meet at the restaurant so maybe casual.	Speaker	Repeating the teacher
7	T: Yeah yeah maybe it's casual.	Speaker?	
8	T: He wants to get together.	Speaker	Get together will be heard in the listening text.
9	T: Repeat.	Addressor	
10	T: He wants to get together.	Speaker	
11	S: He wants to get together.	Speaker	Repetition of item get together.
12	T: Look at this next scene.	Addressor	Teacher points to new illustration.

Figure 6: Participant roles (teaching discourse)

Neither participant speaks extensively in their own person (*addressor*). In most turns the participants take the role of *speaker*, transmitting language items from the syllabus (teacher) or producing these vocabulary items in response to questions (student). The teacher's role is ambiguous; is he an *addressor,* speaking in his own voice to contextualise target language items? It is this paper's contention that his speech is framed by the demands of the syllabus and teaching method, making him a spokesperson (speaker).

IRF patterning

When both participants occupy the *speaker* role, it is manifested in eliciting exchanges realised by IRF patterning (figure 7). The teacher controls the information transmitted by initiating and ending each exchange. The student fulfils a subservient *speaker* role, repeating the teacher's language items or responding as encouraged. The mechanisms of classroom IRF exchanges will be explored further in the discussion of *message content* (section 2.6).

	Initiate	Response	Follow-up	Exchange
1	T: Who is making an appointment here?	S: Oh. Er. Them. NV.	T: Yeah yeah good.	Eliciting
2	T: What's happening here?	S: Uh I think they are scheduling about their next meeting.	T: Yeah good yeah.	Eliciting
3	T: Who called who?	S: Oh. Er.		Eliciting
4	T: Did she call him or -	S: He calls to… he called to her.	T: Yeah.	Eliciting
5	T: Is it formal or casual do you think?	S: Er. Formal.	T: Yeah maybe.	Eliciting
6		S: Maybe formal		
7	T: So er what does he want? Does he want to meet in her office or meet somewhere else?	S: Er. He want to meet at the restaurant so maybe casual.	T: Yeah yeah maybe it's casual.	Eliciting
8	T: He wants to get together. Repeat. He wants to get together.	S: He wants to get together.	T: Good.	Informing Eliciting
9	T: Look at this next scene.	S: NV		Directing

Figure 7: IRF (teaching discourse)

The Francis-Hunston model

The Francis-Hunston model (1992: 128) adapts the Sinclair and Coulthard model in response to conversational data. This model uses two exchange types – Organisational and Conversational – the latter including four subclasses: Elicit, Inform, Direct and Clarify/Repeat/Reinitiate. These exchanges are realised by eight moves, in turn realised by thirty-two acts. The Francis-Hunston model discards classroom specific acts and expands the range of moves and acts in order to handle the greater complexity of conversational data. However, the IRF pattern remains (labeled Eliciting, Informing, Acknowledging).

Participant roles in the casual conversation

The participants both occupy roles of addressor and addressee, indicative of a more symmetrical relationship. The teacher is no longer obliged to act as a mouthpiece for the syllabus, nor the student to answer as expected. This finds expression in the structure of the discourse.

IRF patterning

Figure 8 shows data from the casual conversation, analysed using the Hunston-Francis model.

	Eliciting (I)	Informing (R)	Acknowledging (F)
1	T: How far is it to Kochi? (inq)		
2	S: Kochi? (l)	T: Yeah (i)	
3		S: About four hundred kilometres from here. (i)	T: Okay. (rec)
4		S: It takes five hours by car. (com)	
5	T: You driving? (n.pr)	S: Yeah. (i)	
6	T: Does it snow? Lots of snow? (n.pr)	S: Ah no no. (i) Kochi is er warm. (com)	
7	S: So (m) how about you? (inq)	T: Er I'm going to Kumamoto. (i)	
8	S: Oh Kumamoto? (ret)	T: Yeah my wife is from Kumamoto. (i)	
9	S: Oh? (p)	T: Yeah we'll go down and spend new year with her family. (i) Should be nice. (com)	S: Mm. (eng)
10	S: Your wife's family speak English? (n.pr)	T: Er no, not really. (qu)	

Figure 8: IRF (casual conversation)

The underlying IRF pattern is more complex than in the classroom discourse. In exchanges 1 to 3 the move structure is IIRRF, reflecting the clarify exchange (exchange 2). The absence of moves in the Acknowledge (F) position is noticeable, reflecting the nature of the eliciting moves; participants ask referential questions without need for evaluation. Indeed, follow-up moves are more commonly found in the Eliciting position; in exchange 7 the student initiates the exchange and elicits further information through a variety of different acts. Whereas the classroom discourse sample shows the student performing one act moves, here we see him perform multiple act moves (exchange 6) or two different consecutive moves (exchange 6 and 7). Initiating responsibilities are shared, and the student attempts to organise with a boundary exchange (exchange 7).

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The teaching exchanges reveal IRF patterns that are more distinct than in the casual conversation, which are complex in their move and act structures. This is because the teacher takes the role of speaker, the 'knower' who is 'unequivocally in charge' (van Lier, 2001: 95). Dissemination of knowledge is achieved through IRF exchanges uncomplicated by meaningful student contributions.

2.3　　　Purpose

Hymes distinguishes between a speech event's culturally accepted *outcomes*, and the individual *goals* of the participants (1986: 61). Participant goals may differ or be ambiguous, obscuring the purpose of some speech events. However, for the purposes of this study we can say that 'all speech events and speech acts have a purpose, even if occasionally it is only phatic' (Coulthard, 1985: 47). The following sections examine the purpose of the two discourse types at the levels of event and exchange.

Purposes of the classroom discourse

As a speech event the purpose is predetermined by the syllabus; the textbook chapter goal is to arrange a meeting. The participants decide to arrange a meeting *by phone and e-mail*. Of greater interest to this paper are the steps taken to achieve this outcome at transaction and exchange levels. Willis' model of Inner and Outer language (1992) aids understanding of these purposes.

Willis' Inner and Outer language

Willis (1992) uses the terms Inner and Outer to distinguish between two levels of discourse in the language classroom. Inner language is target forms of the language, pre-determined by the teacher (1992: 163). Outer language is structural, controlling utterances on the Inner. It includes organising, explanatory and checking language (163). This framework complements the Sinclair-Coulthard model, helping us to identify purposes across transactions and exchanges. The following section applies both models to the classroom discourse.

Inner and Outer language in the classroom discourse

Figure 9 shows a transaction from the presentation stage of the lesson, realised by four exchanges. The purpose of the *transaction* is to introduce a language item that will be heard in a listening activity. The purpose of each *exchange* is to create a context in which the meaning of the language item can be introduced and understood.

	Outer	Inner
1	T: Is it formal or casual do you think? S: Er. Formal. T: Yeah maybe. S: Maybe formal	
2	T: So er what does he want? Does he want to meet in her office or meet somewhere else? S: Er. He want to meet at the restaurant so maybe casual. T: Yeah yeah maybe it's casual.	
3	T: Repeat.	T: He wants to get together. T: He wants to get together. S: He wants to get together.
4	T: Right. Look at this next scene.	

Figure 9: Inner and Outer language (teaching discourse)

The transaction progresses from talk on the Outer (build up of context) to talk on the Inner (realisation of the purpose). Thus, the Outer structure stimulates utterances on the Inner, where the pre-selected learning goal resides (Willis, 1992: 163). This is a common pattern, where 'mainly the Outer column is used, with the brief sortie into the Inner Dependent' (1992: 171). Found in classroom transactions focusing on topic, it involves the teacher taking a less controlling role as chairperson and linguistic advisor (1992: 171). However, the transaction in figure 9 is teacher-centred; we might suggest that Willis' model is complicated by one-to-one classes where the teacher is obliged to engage directly with the student.

To achieve the transaction purpose, eliciting exchanges 1 and 2 are used to indirectly introduce the topic/situation. The informing exchange (3) directly disseminates knowledge at the transaction's conclusion, before a boundary exchange (4) signals the end of the transaction and start of the next.

Purposes of the casual conversation

As a speech event, purposes and motivations in the casual conversation are obscure. The purpose may be transactional (e.g. getting information about one another's holiday plans) or interactional (e.g. showing interest in someone's holiday plans). Given that 'talk is rarely all one or the other' (McCarthy, 1991: 136) a focus on speech acts within the discourse can provide some clarity.

Back-channels

We might expect phatic purpose in casual discourse to be evidenced by features that contribute to social bridge building (figure 10).

Feature in the discourse	Contribution to social bridge-building
Back-channel	Unobtrusively acknowledges the speaker's talk and reacts to it (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 12).
Tags	'(O)ften serve just to establish a shared, mutual view of things' (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 17).
Vague language	So as to avoid sounding 'unduly authoritative and assertive' (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 19)
Stories, anecdotes or jokes	Create a casual, friendly tone (McCarthy, 1991: 137).
The listener interrupting, completing sentences or summarizing	Conversation becomes a 'sort of joint enterprise with active listeners' (McCarthy, 1991: 140).
Matching exchanges	Express mutuality

Figure 10: Features that contribute to social bridge building

Back-channels often hold claim to be speaking turns (Carter and McCarthy, 1997:12) but in labeling them as the former we can make the case for phatic purpose. The student's use of repetition (move 3) and 'Oh' / 'Mm' can be said to have a bridge-building function (figure 11).

Beyond this, however, the data exhibits none of the other distinguishing features of phatic speech. The transaction takes on the feel of an interview, as both participants ask questions but rarely comment on the answers received.

	Transcript
1	S: So, how about you?
2	T: Er I'm going to Kumamoto.
3	S: **Oh** Kumamoto?
4	T: Yeah my wife is from Kumamoto.
5	S: **Oh?**
6	T: Yeah we'll go down and spend new year with her family. Should be nice.
7	S: **Mm.**

Figure 11: Back-channels (casual conversation) (in bold)

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The classroom discourse has a clear purpose at speech event level, and every exchange is a step towards realising this purpose. The move from Outer to Inner by way of IRF patterning is a distinguishing feature, and evidence of transactional purpose in the classroom. In the casual conversation purpose is more obscure, with few distinguishing features to suggest transactional or interactional motivations. This may be due to the student's linguistic limitations. Similarly, teacher and student may be conditioned by classroom talk, eliciting exchanges becoming their default conversation style.

2.4 Key

Key refers to the 'tone, manner or spirit' of a speech event or act, signaled verbally or non-verbally (Hymes, 1986: 62). Speech events identical in their parameters may differ in key; mock or serious, painstaking or perfunctory.

Syllabic prominence in the classroom discourse

Prominence refers to the syllables that a speaker chooses to stress (Brazil, 1997: 21). Distinctive use of prominence can illustrate the attitude of the speaker and tone of the speech event. In the classroom data we find overuse of prominence by the teacher, slowing down the delivery and creating a 'painstaking' questioning style (figure 12). This may be typical of classroom talk, as the teacher strives for explicitness and intelligibility.

> T: SO // er WHAT does he WANT? // DOES he want to // MEET in her OFFICE // OR // MEET somewhere ELSE?

Figure 12: Prominence (teaching discourse)

Mechanical manner

The teacher aims to present target forms efficiently. The concise utterances that characterize IRF help achieve this. Consequently, speech acts take on a mechanical quality as the participants speak in their

implicitly understood 'slots'. The talk becomes even more perfunctory as the target form is revealed, drilled then abandoned using directives (figure 13).

Transcript
T: He wants to get together. T: Repeat. T: He wants to get together. S: He wants to get together. T: Look at this next scene.   *(Teacher points at illustration book)* S: NV

Figure 13: Mechanical IRF drilling (teaching discourse)

Humour in the casual conversation

The casual conversation can be said to have a friendly, humorous key. Both participants laugh at various points in the conversation, and the data displays none of the overuse of prominence found in the teaching discourse.

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The classroom discourse displays a formal, business-like key in its extensive prominence and mechanical turn taking. This reflects the teacher's clear purpose, and his power to realise the speech event/act goals through IRF. The casual conversation is subject to none of these pressures.

2.5 Channels

The medium through which the message flows is labeled channel (Hymes, 1986: 62).

Coulthard states that most genres of speech use only one (typically oral) channel (1985: 49). However, it is useful to consider channel as 'some combination of visual, audible, verbal, nonverbal, and physical media through which a message passes' (Medley, 1999: 669). This section examines how such combinations affect the classroom discourse, where multiple channels are used.

Channels in the classroom discourse

The lesson incorporates teaching aids, resulting in channels other than face-to-face (oral-visual). These include:

- whiteboard (oral-visual)
- notepad (oral-visual)
- illustration book (oral-visual)
- cd player (aural-verbal)

- textbook (oral-visual)

Speed and rhythm

Teaching aids are used in boundary exchanges, to organise the discourse. The whiteboard is used to write down the lesson goal (figure 14). Speech slows down and sentences are left hanging as the teacher interchanges between channels.

Transcript
T: Well 　　∧ T: maybe we'll do both, we've got time, we might 　　∧ 　let's say our goal is to er arrange a meeting 　　∧ 　*(teacher writes on whiteboard)* 　　∧ 　over the phone 　　∧ 　*(teacher continues writing)* 　　∧ 　and by e-mail 　　∧ 　*(teacher continues writing)* 　　∧ 　making an appointment. 　*(teacher finishes writing)*

Figure 14: The effect of the whiteboard (teaching discourse)

Directive acts

In the second boundary exchange (figure 15) the textbook is used to signal a move into the presentation stage. This necessitates the use of directive acts, a recurring feature (figure 16).

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│             Transcript              │
├─────────────────────────────────────┤
│                                     │
│  T: So                              │
│      ^                              │
│    (teacher opens textbook)         │
│                                     │
│  T: let's look in the book.         │
│      ^                              │
│    (teacher points to the page)     │
│                                     │
│     This is er unit fourteen.       │
│                                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 15: Directive acts (teaching discourse) (in bold)

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Transcript                         │
├─────────────────────────────────────┤
│                                     │
│  T: He wants to get together.       │
│  T: Repeat.                         │
│  T: He wants to get together.       │
│  S: He wants to get together.       │
│  T: Look at this next scene.        │
│                                     │
│     (Teacher points at illustration book) │
│                                     │
│  S: NV                              │
│                                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 16: Further directive acts (teaching discourse)

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The casual conversation uses only one channel, while the classroom utilises several. This reflects their genres; casual conversation is usually spontaneous and channels are unprepared. The most identifiable features are found in the classroom discourse, where speech rhythm and speed are affected. Directives focus attention on the classroom aids and their channels. These features result from the teacher's control of multiple channels as he executes his lesson plan.

2.6 Message content

Hymes identifies message content as 'a question of *topic* and of change of topic' (1986: 60). This is dependent on participants understanding the topic, contributing to and changing it. Coulthard (1985: 49) contends that in some speech events topic affects *style*, an ambiguous term. We might posit that it involves message *form*, explored in section 2.7.

Message content of the classroom discourse

Message content conflates with *purpose*; the topic of the lesson is predetermined by the syllabus/ textbook. As the teacher is spokesperson for the syllabus, we can say that the agenda is his. The following section summarises how this affects the discourse.

Display questions

The teacher organises the discourse through boundary exchanges according to his lesson plan, which centres on a single topic. IRF patterning keeps the student locked into the response slot, denying him follow-up moves and topic changes. This type of IRF exchange relies on the *display* question, an inquiry to which the answer is already known (Cullen, 1998: 181). Figure 17 shows the predominance of the *display* type.

	First turn (I)	Question type	Reason	Third turn (F)
1	T: Who is making an appointment here?	Display	The illustration book picture makes the answer obvious (the man and woman).	T: Yeah yeah good.
2	T: What's happening here?	Display	They are obviously making a phone call.	T: Yeah good yeah.
3	T: Who called who?	Display	The illustration book picture makes the answer obvious (the man called the woman)	T: Yeah.
4	T: Did she call him or -	Display	This is a leading question to elicit the opposite, i.e. 'he called her'.	T: Yeah maybe.
5	T: Is it formal or casual do you think?	Display	The illustration book picture makes the answer obvious. (casual)	T: Yeah yeah maybe it's casual.
6	T: So er what does he want? Does he want to meet in her office or...	Display	The illustration book picture makes the answer obvious.	T: Good.

Figure 17: Display questions (teaching discourse)

Evaluative follow-ups

Van Lier suggests that only in the feedback slot does the purpose of the IRF exchange become clear (2001: 94). Figure 17 also shows the corresponding third turns to the display questions. They are evaluative, and so the purpose of the exchange is to check the student's knowledge. At no point is the student invited to elaborate further, which would offer the opportunity to change the topic.

Message content of the casual conversation

Casual talk is characterised by topic switching, provoked by physical or mental associations and controlled by no one person (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 87). Interlocutors can choose to contribute to the topic or not, and 'decisions about who says what to whom are up for grabs' (Nunan, 1987: 137).

Topic change

The student initiates exchanges with referential questions (inquiries to which the answer is unknown), taking the conversation into new areas (figure 18). The fact that they are not new topics may be down to the brief nature of the conversation. However, the student is participating in a more symmetrical transaction to which both parties meaningfully contribute.

	Transcript
1	S: So, how about you?
2	T: Er I'm going to Kumamoto.
3	S: Oh Kumamoto?
4	T: Yeah my wife is from Kumamoto.
5	S: Oh?
6	T: Yeah we'll go down and spend new year with her family. Should be nice.
7	S: Mm.
8	S: Your wife's family speak English?

Figure 18: Referential questions (casual conversation)

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The classroom discourse is clearly organised to be at the service of the teacher's aims, rather than allowing the student to participate proactively. Display questions and purely evaluative feedback are clearly identifiable in the IRF exchanges that progress the discourse. Although topic change is discernable in the casual conversation, it is not pronounced. This may be due to the non-native speaker's lack of skill or confidence in performing such functions.

2.7 Message form

Message form is important because '*how* something is said is part of *what* is said' (Hymes, 1986: 59). This necessitates the study of individual utterance form, why it was chosen and how it relates to the particular discourse type.

Face-saving and politeness in the classroom discourse

The concept of *face* originated from Goffman (1976) and was developed by Brown and Levinson (1978) as 'something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced' (Brown and Levinson (1978), cited in Coulthard, 1985: 50). Interactive acts can threaten *face*, and so utterance form 'can be explained in terms of speakers attempting to defuse a Face Threatening Act (FTA)' (Coulthard, 1985: 50).

The student is emotionally invested in the lesson, yet subjected to on-going elicitation and evaluation by the teacher. Under such conditions, the potential for FTAs is high, and the teacher may try to avoid them through polite language. The question form 'What would you prefer to do..?' (figure 19) is less direct than, say, 'Do you want to..?'. The teacher's agreement ('yeah') strives for commonality (he may not, in fact,

agree).

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T: What would you prefer to do, er, telephone or an e-mail?
S: E-mail is easier.
T: Yeah.
```

Figure 19: Indirect questions and agreement (teaching discourse)

Similarly, the teacher uses 'we', 'us' and 'our' to communicate shared experience (figure 20), and dilute feelings of threat common in students sat close to the teacher (Tan Kok Siang, 2008: 71).

```
T: Well
       ∧
T: maybe we'll do both, we've got time, we might…let's say
our goal is to er arrange a meeting (teacher writes on
whiteboard)…over the phone…and by e-mail…making an
appointment.
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Figure 20: Shared experience (teaching discourse)

Finally, the lowering of expectations ('Don't worry about mistakes') and explicit praising ('Great job') are used to avoid putting the student in a face-threatening position. In figure 21 'yeah yeah' becomes a term of praise, while the use of 'maybe' is a hedge, showing sensitivity to face.

```
T: So er what does he want? Does he want to meet in her
office or meet somewhere else?
S: Er. He want to meet at the restaurant so maybe casual.
T: Yeah yeah maybe it's casual.
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Figure 21: Face-preserving techniques (teaching discourse)

Ellipsis in the casual conversation

A recurring feature in the casual talk is ellipsis (figure 22). It is a marker of informality between speakers (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 15) absent from the classroom data.

> T: Yeah my wife is from Kumamoto.
>
> S: Oh?
>
> T: Yeah we'll go down and spend new year with her family. Should be nice.
>
> S: Mm.
>
> S: Your wife's family speak English?

Figure 22: Ellipses (casual conversation) (in bold)

Which speech event has the most identifiable features?

The classroom discourse has the most distinguishable features. The psychological setting and IRF patterning create conditions where face can be easily threatened, and language features reflect the teacher's battle to avoid FTAs. This is in contrast to the 'looser' exchanges in the casual talk, where there is less concern about losing face.

3. Conclusion

Within each of Hymes' parameters the pedagogical speech event is subject to specific demands that constrain the discourse (figure 23). To satisfy these demands, certain behaviours and strategies are adopted which are easily identifiable in the data. This is not the case in the casual conversation; the looser context leads to discourse with less pronounced features, even taking into account that one participant is a non-native speaker.

Hymes' parameter	Constraining elements	
	lesson	Casual conversation
Setting	Limited time, use of teaching aids, psychological setting and cultural expectations.	
Participants	Teacher must pass on information from syllabus.	
Purpose	To fulfil the role of *speaker*.	
Key	Teacher needs to be intelligible and explicit.	
Channel	Multiple channels needed to transmit information.	
Message content	No topic change allowed except when teacher permits.	
Message form	Strong desire to preserve face.	Desire to save face.

Figure 23: Summary of constraining elements

This kind of analysis is useful for comparing different discourse types. Hymes' framework allows us to engage with context and situation; the relatively few parameters help identify a wide range of possible constraints on the discourse. However, it is only a *general* framework; other models are needed to isolate actual features in the discourse itself. By contrasting the findings, we can reach a clearer idea of what gives a speech genre its identity; in this paper the two speech events are typical examples of their genre, and diametrically opposed. Such information is useful if the goal of classroom language lessons is to expose students to language and patterns commonly found in conversational discourse. By understanding what makes classroom discourse unique we can better prepare learners for language use in the real world.

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