ABSTRACT

This ethnography was an attempt to describe classroom interaction in two undergraduate literature classes at De La Salle University. It focused on the identification of (1) the different instructional events that occurred in the classes, (2) the patterns of interaction that prevailed in each event, (3) the kinds of questions asked by teachers in the classroom and the questioning patterns they used, and (4) the nature of student responses to the questions. An attempt was also made to identify the options of student talk and the constraints that operated on these options.

Ethnographic monitoring was used to collect the needed data. This was done by personally attending, observing, and audiotaping each of the classes for ten recitation sessions. Class 1 (Introduction to Literary Forms) was observed during the third trimester of the school year 1986-1987; Class 2 (Philippine Literature in English), during the second trimester of the school year 1987-1988. Observation notes made during the actual monitoring time and the transcribed form of the recorded verbal
interaction in both classes served as the major sources of data.

Descriptive data obtained from the study were analyzed and interpreted in the light of existing theories and literature on classroom processes and management. Certain quantitative data, specifically, the number of questions asked by the teacher and the number of lines of teacher and student talk in each class were tested for significant difference by using the t-test. The relationship between the levels of questions and the nature of student responses to these questions was tested for significance by using the chi-square test. Results were interpreted at the five percent level.

The study revealed that the nature of interaction in the monitored classes was determined by the purposes of the instructional events and the methods of negotiation used to attain the pedagogical purpose of each event. Four major instructional events were found common to both classes: Lesson Focus, Quiz Negotiation, Reading A Selection, and Assignment Focus. Other instructional events observed in the classes were
the Lecture, Reading Negotiation, and Writing Negotiation.

Reading A Selection was the most negotiated instructional event. In Class 1, this event was negotiated in various ways - through lecture, whole-class discussion, and creative activities like recitation and interpretative reading, creative writing, drama and role-play, debate, reporting and panel-forum, students' question time, and talk story done either individually, in pairs, or in small groups. In Class 2, this event was negotiated in the usual lecture and whole-class discussion methods.

The patterns of interaction, found dependent on the purpose of the event itself, were the simple-one-way, the simple interactive, and the multiple forms. The simple-one-way pattern prevailed in Lesson Focus, Quiz Negotiation, Assignment Focus, Lecture, Reading Negotiation, and Writing Negotiation. The general purpose of negotiation in these events was either to inform or direct students in the undertaking of certain academic tasks. The simple interactive and the multiple patterns prevailed in the Reading A Selection event. When "reading" was negotiated through whole-class
discussion using the question-and-answer technique, the patterns of interaction was simple-interactive; when "reading" was negotiated through creative activities involving students individually, in pairs, or in small groups, the pattern of interaction shifted to multiple forms. Here, the purpose of instruction was either to evaluate or gain insights into the students' understanding, interpretation, and appreciation of texts they were being assigned to read.

The varied ways by which "reading" was negotiated in Class 1 resulted in more student talk (52.22%) than teacher talk (48.78%). However, the t-test revealed that the difference was insignificant. Therefore, in Class 1, the teacher and the students had equal participation in the classroom. In Class 2, teacher talk comprised 76.68%; student talk, only 23.32%. The t-test showed that the difference was significant. Therefore, in Class 2, the teacher had greater control over classroom talk. Student participation was lesser compared to that in Class 1.

The study revealed that student talk in the classes was either solicited or spontaneous. Solicited talk was observed when the teacher
nominated a student to answer a question, comply with an imperative, or perform an academic task. Talk was spontaneous when the students offered to talk without having been nominated. However, before spontaneous talk could occur, it was first necessary for students to gain access to the floor. This was done by bidding. Students bade by raising their hands, by calling teacher's attention with a steady forefinger, by meeting teacher's gaze, or by maintaining steady eye contact with the teacher.

Constraints on the students' options to talk in the classroom included the classroom norm calling for one participant talking at a time, the number of students demanding teacher's attention and recognition, teacher's desire to distribute the oral participation among students discouraging a student from monopolizing a session, and teacher's desire to proceed with the lesson and activities as planned.

The study revealed a total of 682 teacher questions asked in both classes, most of which were of the interpretation (Q1) category. The least asked were questions of the conjecture (Qc) category. Grouped into the three levels of complexity, teacher questions were found to be
mostly Level 2, (conjecture, explanation, interpretation) comprising 49.42%. Level 1 questions (memory, vocabulary) comprised 29.47%, and Level 3 (appreciation, evaluation) 21.11%. The t-test revealed that the questions asked in both classes were similar.

It was also revealed that the most dominant pattern of questioning used by the teacher for any question category was composed of a single question followed by a congruent response (QR+). This was found closely associated with the interpretation (Qi) and memory (Qm) categories. The same pattern followed by an elaborated response (QR+e) was found closely associated with appreciation (Qa) questions. Also, thinking time (-) and cueing (/) were found attributes of patterns used to ask explanation (Qex) questions. This pattern of questioning also elicited elaborated responses.

In terms of question-response congruence, the highest percentage was obtained for questions of the interpretation (Qi) category; the lowest, for questions of the conjecture (Qc) category. Percentage of congruence for all questions asked in
Class 1 was 63.98%; in Class 2, 56.29% or an average of 59.48% for both classes.

The nature of student responses to teacher questions was found to be more restricted (85.74%) than elaborated (14.26%). The highest percentage (96.77%) of restricted responses was obtained for vocabulary (Qv), questions; the lowest (50.00%), for conjecture (Qc) questions. The chi-square test showed that the kinds of questions asked had something to do with the nature of responses made.

Results of the study implied that Level 1 questions tended to elicit restricted responses, and as the level of questions went higher, the questions tended to get more elaborated responses.