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From Language as System to Language as Discourse

Michael McCarthy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Language as a system

When language is viewed as a system, we see it in terms of its component parts and how these interact. The three basic components are *substance*, *form* and *meaning*. *Substance* refers to the sounds the language uses (phonic substance), for example, its vowels and consonants, and the symbols used in writing (graphic substance). Next, we have three basic types of *form*: grammar, lexis and phonology. In the case of grammar, English forms include past-tense endings, modal verbs and prepositions, along with rules for putting these together (syntax). The lexical forms consist of words, which follow rules for vowel and consonant combinations, how they combine with other words in collocations, fixed expressions, etc. and how they interact with the grammar. Phonology gives us the forms for pronunciation, stress (the syllable with most intensity) and intonation (e.g. whether the voice rises or falls). The third component, *meaning*, refers to what the combinations of form and substance signify (the semantics). In English, the form *was speaking* signifies past time, *green* and *blue* signify particular colours and rising intonation often signifies a question. If we reverse this perspective, meaning is what we intend to say, form is how we assemble the message using appropriate words, grammar and sounds (or written symbols), and substance is what we actually say or write.

We find information on the system in reference grammars (for English, this includes reference grammars such as Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006), in dictionaries (e.g.

Macmillan 2002; Hornby 2010), which usually give information on pronunciation. Works describing English intonation tend to be more specialised (e.g. Cruttenden 1997; Trench 2015).

1.2 Language as discourse

The system and its components form the raw material for the teaching and learning of languages. Every learner expects to be instructed in the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary of the target language, and teachers and learners alike expect that major course books will have grammar charts and target vocabulary, listening and speaking sections where pronunciation and stress are practised, and reading and writing material where working with the graphic substance is on offer, for example, learning a new alphabet or learning punctuation rules. However, the system exists for a purpose, and that purpose is communication. Putting the system work to enable communication means engaging in *discourse*, the creation of meaning in context. Cook (1989: 6) simply calls it ‘language in use, for communication’. Gee and Handford (2012: 1), in their definition of discourse, refer to ‘the meanings we give language and the actions we carry out when we use language in specific contexts’. The language we access within the system is transformed into *language as discourse* (McCarthy and Carter, 1994). This approach to language, therefore, is distinct from language as system, and may represent quite a new perspective on the raw material of their trade for trainee teachers. Language does not take place in a vacuum. However, language as system, often presented at sentence level and isolated from real world contexts, can be studied as if it does, and, at least up to the recent past, was the starting point from which many teacher education programmes approached the language elements of their syllabuses.

One of the major developments in recent decades has been a better understanding of the differences between speaking and writing, of how there is no one, single difference that accounts for everything (Chafe 1982; Hughes 1996: 6-15), and how speaking and writing often cross over or ‘blur’ in contexts such as lectures (often written-to-be spoken) and in the language of the internet (Crystal 2006; Herring 2010). Until relatively recently, many language courses, at secondary school and university level, focused primarily on the study of the great literature of the target language and on essay writing, with perhaps the occasional ‘conversation class’ and an oral examination tagged on. The model of the target language was typically a written one. Nowadays, thanks to our ability to record and store huge amounts of spoken and written data in corpora, we can observe significant differences between written and spoken discourse, and where they meet and create blends such as social media usage. In this chapter, we exemplify from several corpora of spoken data, for it is only by looking at attested data that we can begin to be objective about how discourse functions. The corpora we cite are the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) and the British National Corpus (BNC). For more information on these corpora see Simpson-Vlach and Leicher (2006), Clancy (2016) or Aston and Burnard (1998), respectively. In all instances, we focus on spoken discourse to re-balance the past focus on writing and suggest ways in which pedagogy can move from knowledge of the system to the skills and strategies needed to create and participate in discourse. In doing so, we argue for language as discourse as an essential component in both pre- and in-service language teachers’ repertoires. More specifically, we highlight the importance of a language as discourse approach and how to practically implement it in the language classroom through a discussion of methods, materials and classroom practices.

2 BEYOND THE SENTENCE

In English, the sentence has been for centuries a powerful and dominant notion. Forming sentences requires attention to the rules as to how phrases and clauses combine in the system. However, Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) pioneering work showed that it was possible to describe language in use without having recourse to the notion of sentences, while still showing how spoken language was structured and not randomly put together. They recorded lessons in English school classrooms and showed how the language of teachers and pupils followed set patterns during the process of teaching and learning. For example, in this exchange from the MICASE corpus, the lecturer asks a number of questions, students answer and the lecturer gives feedback, reinforcing the correct answer.

(1)

[Context: Taken from a Visual Sources lecture. S1 = lecturer, the other speakers are students. SU-f = unknown speaker, female; SU-m = unknown speaker, male; parentheses indicate uncertain speech]

S1: listen to this. there is the Nile.
S5: yes.
S1: which is where?
S5: in Egypt
SU-f: Africa.
S1: there's the Ganges.
S4: India.
SU-m: India
S1: India. there's the Danube.
SU-m: Turkey. no?
S1: Danube. <SINGING> da da da da dum, bum bum, bum bum
SU-f: none of us know it so you can just like tell us
SU-f: Germany
SU-m: yeah it's the Blue Danube. we know the song. (just tell me where it is)
S1: where is the Blue Danube?
SU-f: Austria.
SU-m: (she's) got a correct answer.
S1: Austria. Excellent. [continues]

(MICASE)

Notably, the teacher’s feedback is withheld until the correct answer is given about the Danube. The example shows that teacher and students are both adhering to a set of conventions that are independent of sentences; we need not refer to sentences to understand what has happened. The pattern of teacher initiation (I), followed by a student response (R), then by teacher feedback, or follow-up (F), referred to as the IRF pattern, is a powerful and embedded structure which all the parties involved are accustomed to. The IRF pattern is a useful way of putting knowledge on public display and reinforcing learning. In non-classroom situations, we can see similar patterns, as in example (2), taken from family discourse.

(2)

[**Context:** Two siblings are trying to fix a computer printer. S1 = male, aged 24; S2 = female, aged 22]

S1: So what's the problem?	Initiation
S2: We needed to replace the print head.	Response
S1: Oh right.	Feedback

(LCIE)

Here (I) is a question, (R) is a response to the question, and (F) acknowledges and accepts the response. This is what the speakers focus on; they know what to do to complete a satisfactory exchange. Studying language as discourse is not dependent on the notion of the sentence, or as Brazil (1995: 15) puts it ‘we do not necessarily have to assume that the consideration of such abstract notions as “sentences” enters into the user's scheme of things at all.’

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) also showed how teachers marked the transition from one stage to another by using words and phrases such as *Right, Now, Well* and *Now then*, which are termed *discourse markers*. Alongside markers which organise phases or sections of a discourse, other markers point to degrees of shared knowledge (*you know, obviously, you see*). These

markers are not part of the structure of sentences; they operate at the level of discourse (for general discussions, see Schiffrin 1987; Jucker and Ziv 1998: 1ff; Fraser 1999; Fischer 2006). A marker such as *I mean* or *actually* can modify a whole stretch of discourse consisting of a number of clauses and can exercise influence over not only the speaker's own turn but the contributions of others too. An example would be the way speakers use *anyway* in English to indicate "I think we've both/all said enough on this topic", used as a pre-closing move, as in this extract from a radio phone-in show.

(3)

[**Context:** Participants have been discussing tattoos as identifying marks for sailors. S1 = presenter; S2 = caller]

S2: But the ehh the ehh they saw the tattoos were used extensively by sea captains to identify their their sailors. A lot of sailors and sea going men fell over. Excuse me I've a frog in my throat.

S1: That's okay.

S2: Emm a lot of sailors were lost at sea of course.

S1: Right so. Obviously it would make an enormous amount of sense if there was a distinguishing mark like that. John thank you very much indeed for that. All sorts of other theories on why, when, where, how etc. **Anyway**, that's all from us for today, back with you tomorrow at the usual time until then a very good day to you.

(LCIE)

Fully to understand how the exchanges work in examples (1) to (3) above, we need to consider the following questions:

- How do the speakers relate to one another?
- Where are they?
- What are they doing?
- What are their goals?

We can see how this list of questions involves a complex perspective on how people utilise the system. We see how different *discourse roles* will affect what people say, how they respond to where they are and what they are doing, how they create and maintain relationships through what they say, and how they achieve their goals through verbal exchanges. To exemplify how the system can be exploited, we next look at examples of how grammar and lexis can be put to service in the creation of discourse.

3 CHOICES AT THE DISCOURSE LEVEL

3.1 Grammar as discourse

At the beginning of this chapter, we pointed to the role of grammar within the language system. English grammar consists of a finite set of rules and conventions that are largely deterministic: to express a meaning such as third person singular present tense indicative mood, it is predetermined that a lexical verb must end in *-s* (*she looks, he watches, etc.*). Equally, it is predetermined that in English the definite article will come before, not after, a noun. However, at the discourse level, grammar can be exploited to realise a variety of purposes, for example, to create and maintain good relationships or to indicate degrees of familiarity. In extract (4), from a conversation between friends, we see how ellipsis (the non-use of an element of the grammar normally considered compulsory), contributes to informality and friendliness.

(4)

[**Context:** Friends in an Indian restaurant having a meal. S1 = unknown; S2 = female, student, aged 20; S3 = female, student, aged 20]

S1: **You finished?** Yeah.

S2: <laughing> No.
S3: Can I just finish this chi=?
S2: Huh!
S3: <laughing> Oh my God!

(BNC)

S1 says *You finished?* rather than *Have you finished?*, which the rules of English grammar normally require. Not saying *have* is a choice; it is not compulsory in the way the third person singular *-s* is on present tense indicative verbs. In informal contexts such as that of (4), the probability of ellipsis is greater than in formal settings (Caines et al. 2017). For this reason, Carter and McCarthy (2006: 6-7) refer to the 'grammar of choice' as being a feature of discourse. Speakers and writers choose to exploit the available grammatical resources in ways which are appropriate to their roles and to create the relationships that best enable them to achieve their goals.

Another, familiar, everyday strategy to exemplify the choices speakers make to create successful discourse is the telling of stories and anecdotes, where we often find speakers moving from the canonical past tense to the present tense (the so-called *present historic*) to heighten and intensify dramatic elements. In extract (5), a speaker is recounting a story about someone who bought some very expensive prawns.

(5)

[*name of a well-known supermarket]

A: Tell Dad about the prawns Mary.
B: Grainne **bought** a small box of prawns for Kieran.
A: You know the prawns?
C: Yeah.
B: Kieran came out and he **was** like "how much were the prawns?" She **goes** "I don't know" and he **said** "roughly how much are they?". "About two three or four euros. Two or three". "They were a tenner. It says a tenner here."
C: And what **were** they?
B: A tenner. She **checked** them then when she **went** into Roches*.

(LCIE)

The story moves from the past to the present when the most important statement is quoted (*She goes "I don't know"*), then back into the past. This is a choice; it is not a compulsory element of the system. The present tense is a marked choice; the past tense is the unmarked, most typical form in story-telling. Schiffrin (1981) shows how shifts from past to historic present are not random but are woven into the structure of narratives and relate to particular segments of a story (see also Rühlemann 2007).

One striking aspect of how grammar operates at the discourse level is the way speakers co-construct grammatical patterns – in other words, clause combinations which in writing would qualify to be labelled as sentences may be jointly produced by more than one participant in a conversation. Speakers can expand on a potentially complete utterance by the addition of a subordinate clause. This is typically done using conjunctions such as *then*, *when*, *which*, or as is the case in (6), *if*.

(6)

[**Context:** Speakers are discussing having two phone lines in the house]

S1: But in that case if you're going to have that, then you've a right to have two lines in the house

S2: Exactly

S1: and use one as a business line

S2: Exactly

S1: and one as a pleasure line

S2: **Exactly and that's what I'm gonna do, exactly**

S1: **if there's anything you can do** (unclear)

S2: **Yep, I agree, exactly** and that's the only way you can do it ...

(BNC)

S2 says *Exactly and that's what I'm gonna do, exactly*, which is syntactically complete. S1 then expands on this utterance with *if there's anything you can do*, effectively treating S2's utterance as a 'main clause' to which a 'subordinate' *if*-clause can be attached. This *if*-clause

functions to qualify S2's statement of intent by suggesting that there may or may not be something that can be done about the present situation. This modification could prove to be interpersonally complex given, for example, the politeness issues involved in commenting on, qualifying or evaluating another speaker's utterance (see Ferrara 1992). However, S2 responds to S1's modification with the unambiguously positive *Yep, I agree, exactly*. Clancy and McCarthy (2015) have shown how co-construction is an integral, largely unproblematic part of the turn-taking system and that, to account for this behaviour, we have to move beyond the sentence to a view that sees both syntax and meaning as a shared interactional resource (after Rühlemann 2007). Rather than viewing syntax and meaning as static products of grammars and dictionaries, we should instead see them as emergent, as interaction unfolds in particular contexts, a concept which belongs in the realm of discourse and not system.

3.2 Lexis as discourse

What we have said about grammar can also be applied to lexis. Although the vocabulary of a language like English consists of a huge repertoire of words and phrases, presenting learners with a daunting task, there are significant areas where we can move away from seeing the lexicon as a component of the system towards seeing it as a strategic resource for the creation of discourse.

One such area is the choice of degrees of formality. Formality is concerned with making choices appropriate to the context and the relationship between the participants. Most words in English are neutral as to their degree of formality, but many words are conventionally associated with either formal or informal contexts. For example, phrasal verbs often convey greater informality than non-phrasal verbs that convey similar meanings. It is more informal to

say *I screwed up*, rather than *I made a mistake/I did something wrong*. Similarly, idioms often convey a degree of familiarity, offering informal comments and evaluations of people and events (McCarthy 1998: 131-140). Good dictionaries give guidance as to the level of formality associated with particular items. An allied question is whether descriptions of formal/informal language and formal/informal contexts can be applied across cultures or whether different cultures may view similar situations and relationships in different ways (see Irvine 2009).

While most language teachers will have long been familiar with the notion of formality, it is only relatively recently that corpus analysis has revealed just how much of everyday discourse is composed of ready-made, multi-word units rather than single words. These multi-word units include familiar items such as phrasal verbs, idioms and prepositional phrases (e.g. *get up, feel under the weather, at the moment*). From the point of view of lexis as discourse, corpora show how frequent and important some multi-word strings (hereafter referred to as *chunks*) are in the structuring of discourse and the creation and maintenance of relationships. For example, many of the chunks in Table 1.1 are associated with *you* and *I*, demonstrating the interactive nature of the most frequent chunks.

Table 1.1: The ten most frequent 2-, 3- and 4-word chunks in the spoken component of the BNC BABY

N	2-word chunks	3-word chunks	4-word chunks
1	<i>you know</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>I don't know what</i>
2	<i>I don't</i>	<i>do you want</i>	<i>do you want to</i>
3	<i>do you</i>	<i>I don't think</i>	<i>no no no no</i>
4	<i>in the</i>	<i>you have to</i>	<i>I thought it was</i>
5	<i>I mean</i>	<i>a lot of</i>	<i>what do you want</i>
6	<i>I think</i>	<i>what do you</i>	<i>are you going to</i>
7	<i>is it</i>	<i>I mean I</i>	<i>I don't know whether</i>
8	<i>it was</i>	<i>I think it's</i>	<i>thank you very much</i>
9	<i>on the</i>	<i>do you think</i>	<i>have a look at</i>
10	<i>you got</i>	<i>you want to</i>	<i>I don't think I</i>

The table contains a number of ‘fragments’ indicative of the syntactic system, e.g. *in the, it was, what do you* and *you want to*. However, it is interpersonal meaning that accounts for many of the items in the table. For example, *you know, I mean, I think* and *I don’t know* are associated with linguistic politeness (see Fox Tree and Schrock 2002). As table 1.1 demonstrates, individual items like *know* and *think* provide us with the building blocks for different structures with interpersonal import, e.g. *I think → I don’t think → I don’t think I → I don’t think I have*, etc. These ‘frames’, to which content is attached, demonstrate the routine nature of everyday spoken language which facilitates fluent, successful discourse.

Also common in everyday spoken discourse are chunks such as *and things like that, that sort/kind of thing* and *or whatever*, which operate beyond the sentence. These *vague category markers* are particularly significant in the way they project common ground among participants. The speaker who says, “There’s a whole new grammar for text messages and that sort of thing” assumes the listener(s) will mentally fill in the rest of the possible referents of *that sort of thing* (e.g., social media, blogs, emails, etc.) and does not need to have them explicitly listed. Vague category markers have been extensively studied and are seen as central to normal, efficient discourse, especially conversation (see Channell 1994; Cutting 2007; Vaughan et al. 2017). Vague language items and the other interactive chunks already discussed are best seen as ‘big words’ and should be considered as much a part of the vocabulary of a language as the thousands of single words needed to talk about people and things, and their place in the syllabus should be central if we are to move from system-based teaching to a discourse-based approach.

A further feature of lexis as discourse is seen in the way speakers pick up one another's vocabulary for strategic acts such as agreement or the negotiation of meaning. Carter and McCarthy (1988: 181-200) observed how speakers exploit features of the system such as synonymy and antonymy to show engagement with one another (see also Buttery and McCarthy, 2012). In extract (7), we can see how S1 not only co-constructs the message by using a *which*-clause, but also uses a lexical strategy, picking up on the notion of 'difficulty' by using a synonym to agree with another speaker. This is an example of how meaning is negotiated rather than being fossilised in the semantic system.

(7)

S3: So I've no lectures. I've to do the research myself.
S2: You've to do it yourself.
S3: Which is **harder** like.
S1: Which would be very **difficult** I'd say.
S3: Yeah

(LCIE)

Teachers and learners may occasionally ponder why a language like English often seems to have more than one way of expressing the same idea, and many learners make notes to help them remember the meaning of a new word by listing any synonyms or antonyms they know. Here teaching can capitalise on a feature of the system and turn it into a useful strategy for communication. Simple pair-work activities where students agree with one another's statements using synonyms, or challenge one another using antonyms, are a natural context for putting the system into service to create discourse.

One final area where we see the lexicon serving the creation of discourse is in turn-taking behaviour. We know, from classic studies of turn-taking (e.g. Sacks et al. 1974), that speaking

turns proceed smoothly, with one speaker ceding the turn to another as conversation unfolds. Corpus analysis enables us to see just how consistently and with what degree of regularity the vocabulary plays a role in smooth, natural turn-taking. McCarthy (2003 and 2015) showed, for example, that a relatively small number of lexical items are repeatedly used in different varieties of English to express reactions to, and engagement with, incoming talk without taking over the full speaking turn. These lexical items we refer to as *response tokens*, which often occur singly as in extract (8), e.g. *Absolutely! Great! No way!* or often with *that* (*That's awful! That's wonderful!*).

(8)

S1: Hi Ann (pause) had a good
S2: Hello.
S1: week?
S2: Yeah lovely.
S1: **Great.**

(BNC)

Corpora often show that a large proportion of occurrences of words like *great* and *absolutely* do not come in the form of adjectives modifying nouns, or adverbs modifying verbs and adjectives, but are used to react to and engage with whole stretches of discourse. As such, they represent an important bonding mechanism between speakers. Tao (2003) and McCarthy (2010) also looked at turn-taking, this time considering how speakers begin their turns, and found that a relatively small number of items typically occurred as turn-openers (e.g. *well*, *so*, *right* and some of the response tokens already mentioned). Turn-openers attend primarily to what the previous speaker has just said, creating a smooth link between speaking turns, what McCarthy (ibid.) calls *confluence*, the feeling that a conversation is flowing, with a jointly constructed fluency.

4 DISCOURSE PEDAGOGY

In this section, we consider how materials, methods and classrooms can be conceived by language teachers in a way that operationalises the notion of language as discourse and weaves it into the pedagogical process. Thus far we have discussed discourse from the point of view of both grammar and lexis, both of which form a large part of day-to-day language teaching from the viewpoint of language as system. However, introducing the concepts of grammar and lexis as discourse furthers understanding of not just language form and function, but the processes, many of them unconscious, which facilitate better and more effective communication. The more teacher education programmes can create bridges and foster links across conceptual divides, the greater the level of language awareness teachers in training and professional development can achieve.

4.1 Discourse roles

One problem with abandoning the sentence as the core unit for teaching and moving instead towards notions such as discourse marking and responding or following up is that, in the traditional, teacher-led classroom, it is teachers who get to use markers like *Anyway*, *Right!* and *Now then!* and responses/follow-ups such as *Good!* and *That's great!* while students may get little or no opportunity to use them because of their limited, less powerful discourse roles. This is the kind of challenge we face in moving from language as system towards language as discourse. It is only one of many challenges, but it represents a prime example of what happens when we break free from seeing the sentence as the principal unit of communication. If markers and response tokens are common and central to the organisation of discourse, how can we create the conditions in the classroom where students themselves can take on roles where the

use of markers and other discourse features traditionally the province of the teacher (e.g. initiating, using follow-up moves) become natural for them to use? Questions such as how to apportion discourse roles in the classroom affect not only the content of the syllabus, but also methodology and classroom practices.

4.2 The discourse syllabus

An important question is how to create a coherent syllabus which supports the transition from system to discourse in areas of language where the available linguistic repertoire is not closed or as well-described as, say, the tense system, the prepositions, the names of the days of the week, verbs of the senses, and so on. For example, in the case of discourse markers, scholars' lists of what to include differ greatly. Some researchers focus more on markers which support the coherent and logical interpretation of one piece of discourse in relation to another, such as *in other words*, *conversely* or *finally* (e.g. Fraser 1990; Hyland and Tse 2004), while others focus on markers we have already mentioned such as *well*, *you know* and *anyway* (e.g. Schiffrin 1987; Aijmer 2002). Furthermore, attempts to clarify exactly what discursual competence means in second language contexts is often only vaguely defined (see the critique in Jones et al. 2018: 112-123). Defining and specifying content are recurring problems for anyone wishing to incorporate the world of discourse into an organised syllabus.

Another challenge lies in the fact that there is a bewilderingly wide range of contexts in which language use varies according to the situation and the participants. Sinclair and Coulthard's work has been built upon by numerous studies that have looked at how verbal exchanges occur in contexts other than classrooms. These include service encounters (McCarthy 2000; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015), workplaces (Vaughan 2007; Koester 2010), domestic settings (Blum-Kulka

1997; Gordon 2009; Clancy 2016), academic settings (Farr 2011; Evison 2013), settings where people are engaged in action, e.g. assembling furniture, cooking (Carter and McCarthy, 1997) and many other contexts. They have all been examined through a discourse perspective, where the notion of the sentence has played a minor role, if any at all. In these varied studies, key features emerge time and time again as central to the creation of discourse. Areas of focus and insight in existing research where the syllabus can potentially bridge the gap between language as system and language as discourse include:

- Discourse roles
- Types of verbal exchange that are natural in different contexts;
- Natural turn-taking;
- Discourse marking;
- Creating and maintaining relationships;
- Goal-orientation.

Not all of these points offer ready-made linguistic repertoires that can be written into the syllabus. All require thought, planning and a reassessment of methods, materials, activities and classroom practices.

4.3 Materials

Some discourse items, for example discourse markers and response tokens, can be straightforwardly incorporated into materials as new vocabulary, or as new functions for known vocabulary, and can be graded in a coherent syllabus. For example, McCarthy et al (2012 and 2014a) offer interactive activities promoting the use of the marker *actually* at two different CEFR levels. Its first occurrence in the material is at A2 level, with the functions of ‘giving new or surprising information’ and “‘correcting” things people say or think’ (2014a: 7).

Actually is then recycled at B2 level with its function of giving new information, and, in the same unit of the material, the functions attributed to *actually* are repeated in the form of two new discourse markers, *in fact* and *as a matter of fact* (2012: 46-47). This process, from item to discourse function, then from the same discourse function to new item(s), is one way of building coherence and progression into the discourse syllabus. The process can be expressed diagrammatically as:

known item → new discourse function → known discourse function → new item

Perhaps the biggest challenge in connexion with discourse-based materials stems from teachers' and students' expectations as to what materials will contain and how teaching and learning will be conducted. For many years, the sequence *present, practise, produce* (often referred to as PPP) has provided a reliable routine. The materials, mediated by the teacher, present a structure or a set of new vocabulary, after which students do drills or controlled practice, followed by production, which could be anything from pair work to writing an essay. The discourse syllabus demands a different approach, in which building awareness is a central element. Awareness is fostered by *noticing* activities, on the basis that noticing is the first step towards understanding what might not always be familiar concepts for students (e.g. discourse marking, follow-up moves, co-construction). Noticing occupies a well-grounded position in research into language learning (see Schmidt 1990). Shifting the emphasis away from PPP to a more awareness-based approach in materials and student engagement with them is discussed at length in McCarthy and McCarten (in press).

Presenting items in the context of their strategic use rather than their semantic meanings within the system is another key element in discourse-based materials. McCarthy et al. (2014b: 70-

71) illustrate follow-up questions and follow-up prompts (e.g. *Really?*), along with using response tokens, in the context of reacting to new information. The response tokens include *that's great, that's interesting, that's terrible*. Students first do a noticing activity, there then follow listening activities (crucial for building awareness), controlled practice, and free practice with a partner, asking follow-up questions and responding to personalised items of news/interest. Students have considerable choice as to how they respond, with no one single 'correct' answer. All this is done at A1 level, and is feasible because the lexical items are simple, often already known, and the contexts are familiar, everyday conversational settings.

Materials are merely tools for the use of teachers and learners, and it is what happens in the classroom which ultimately underpins their success or failure. We now consider classroom practices in relation to moving from system-dominated approaches to an environment where the creation of discourse is a natural part of the teaching/learning process.

4.4 System and discourse in the classroom

Walsh (2006) sees the L2 classroom not as a static entity, but as a series of dynamic and complex contexts where interaction between participants is essential to teaching and learning. Through looking at classroom language as discourse, he identified four modes which characterise the interaction between teacher and learners: *managerial mode, materials mode, skills and systems mode* and *classroom context mode*. Each of these modes presents the teacher with opportunities to explore language as discourse in the classroom, regardless of the level the learners are at. The pedagogic purpose of *managerial mode* is the management of learning at the different stages of a lesson and is characterised by long teacher speaking turns, transition markers and little or no learner involvement. It may seem that this mode does not offer many

openings to exploit in terms of fostering discourse; however, the teacher can model a range of frequently used organisational markers (*all right, ok, so, now, etc.*), as well as models for feedback of various kinds (*that's fine, excellent*) and the discourse role of manager/leader, which may then be assumed by certain students in pair and group work where tasks demand management and outcomes. The second mode, *materials*, is dominated by exchanges that emerge from language practice opportunities based on a piece of material, which we exemplified in section 4.3, where the materials cited firstly engage the teacher and students in dialogue to raise awareness of target items, then offer students opportunities to practise asking questions, or to react using response tokens, ask follow-up questions and so on, in natural contexts and where they can ultimately personalise the material and make the transition to *classroom context mode* (see below).

In the *skills and systems* mode, the pedagogical goal is to provide controlled, form-focussed language practice in both systems (phonology, grammar, etc.) and skills (reading, listening, etc.). However, we propose that this focussed practice of systems and skills be exploited to also include engagement in language as discourse. For example, past and present simple tenses could be explored through story-telling or through the use of tense-aspect choices for politeness and directness, utilising natural spoken texts. In addition, the teaching of conditionals might be broadened to include pair work where one participant produces a main clause and the other adds a subordinate one to model co-construction. This could then be extended to contexts where lexical strategies are employed to negotiate agreement and disagreement around these co-constructions. Finally, in *classroom context* mode, the defining characteristic is interactional space. In this mode, where the learners themselves co-construct the discourse, the emphasis is on providing opportunities for genuine communication and for extended, learner-led explorations of language as discourse. When practising speaking skills in classroom context

mode, some prompts for language as discourse will naturally occur, given that the learners themselves will have control over the turn-taking system, allowing them the freedom to experiment with strategies such as holding the floor, changing topic and using natural turn-openers and responses. This, in turn, might be scaffolded by some post-activity feedback from the teacher that, instead of focussing on language form, focuses on concepts related to discourse such as (in)appropriacy or (im)politeness, concepts that are often culture- and/or context-specific and part of communicative, rather than linguistic, competence (Hymes, 1972).

5 CONCLUSION

Walsh (2006) refers to his four modes of classroom talk under the umbrella label of SETT (Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk). The choice of that label is not otiose: the teacher is seen as centrally responsible for the maintenance and monitoring of appropriate discourse in the classroom. It is important to acknowledge that English language teachers are faced with a unique teaching context, a 'unique art' (Hammadou and Bernhart 1987: 305), where language is both the medium and intended outcome of instruction. Language teachers, in common with all teachers, strive to become experts in their field of teaching. However, language itself has been variously described as 'slippery and mutable' (Vaughan, 2008: 1) and 'as large and as complex as life' (Palmer, 1998: 2). Therefore, not everything in language teaching needs to be about the classroom; aspects of language teacher education, such as the understanding of language as discourse, should also be concerned with teachers becoming experts in their stock and trade, language. If our goal truly is to move from system to discourse, teacher education has to support teachers' professional development in not only gaining knowledge of discourse, but in becoming discourse analysts themselves, in their own classrooms, and constantly

questioning the degree to which they seize upon and develop opportunities for creating the conditions that will lead to the emergence of natural discourse, whether it be in their interactions with students or in the interactions they set up among them. In order to successfully achieve this, input in the language classroom cannot be confined to language as system because this ignores the fact that language becomes a living, ambiguous, emergent, negotiated phenomenon once it leaves the classroom and enters the world beyond the classroom walls or beyond the screens of the virtual classroom. Indeed, it would be limited and limiting for language teaching professionals to simply base their teaching on what has been written in relation to language as system without considering the implications of using language in real life social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the materials must be supportive of, and reasonably transparent for, teachers who may not be familiar with discourse-oriented pedagogy, with non-patronising, helpful explanations and advice in teachers' manuals which accompany course materials (see also O'Keeffe and Farr, this volume). Ultimately, analysing language as discourse is a critical and fundamental part of any teacher education programme. However, teachers need to feel that time spent on fostering natural discourse is not time wasted and will pay dividends in greater fluency and higher achievement in assessment contexts, as well as increased student motivation and satisfaction.

6 KEY TEXTS

Baker, P. (2006) *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*, London: Continuum.

- A comprehensive introduction to the intersection of corpus linguistics and language as discourse. Particularly strong with regard to the description of the potential of corpus linguistics for the analysis of authentic texts.

Carter, R. and Goddard, A. (2016) *How to Analyse Texts*, London: Routledge.

- A great textbook and toolkit for analysing language in use. It provides the reader with a large amount of texts – spoken, written and multimodal – and a number of levels at which they can be analysed. It is an excellent classroom resource.

O’Keeffe, A., Clancy, B. and Adolphs, S. (2011) *Introducing Pragmatics in Use*, London: Routledge.

- One of the first textbooks to apply a corpus approach to examining language in use. Chapter 8 is devoted entirely to the use of corpus materials to introduce features of language as discourse into the language classroom.

Gee, J.P. and Handford, M. (eds) (2012) *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- A comprehensive collection of articles by leading figures in discourse analysis. Parts III and IV pay particular attention to spoken language and to applications in education, including the classroom.

Walsh, S. (2011) *Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Walsh’s work on interaction in second language classrooms, extensively quoted in the present chapter, is fully and clearly elaborated in this book, which looks at discourse in the classroom as a means towards achieving ‘classroom interactional competence’.

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