

# Constructing international floors for language learning ends: reflecting on a teacher upgrading course<sup>1</sup>

**A B S T R A C T** The main aim of this article is to show that teachers, as superordinates in an authority-based relationship, may consciously construct configurations of the interactional floor to achieve pre-selected language learning ends. The researcher, who participated as a teacher trainer in the TRANSNET-RIEP project, used classroom discourse as tangible evidence of teacher constructions of the interactional floor. Following Jones and Thornborrow (2004: 399-423), he argued that the teacher's discourse competence had to include the ability to construct activity-specific floors to achieve language learning ends. Arguing from a constructivist perspective, he selected the construct  $\pm$  **discursive initiative** as framework. The pole – *initiative* implies that the teacher tightly controls learners' contributions to the discursive process, while the pole + *initiative* relates to teacher initiations framing learner responses that replicate the demands of real-life interaction. In two cycles of an action-research project, the researcher experimented with activities on the continuum between the two poles. Using theoretical sampling, the researcher collected interactional data for two activities representing the medial position on the continuum of data types for the  $\pm$  *discursive initiative construct*. First, he selected an activity in which he was required to mediate the process of generating a dialogue with the trainees. Next, he selected an activity in which the learners were required to generate and practise prepared dialogues. Both dialogues were based on pre-reading activities. In neither activity were learners required to produce discourse under real-time communication constraints. The activity-specific discourse was recorded, transcribed and analysed. The interactional floors that emerged from the activities were then described on the basis of similarities and differences. Their typicality was defined, among others, on the basis of the **construct local-allocational versus boundary-restricted teacher mediation speech acts**.

**Keywords:** language learning, floors, Transnet-roiep-project

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<sup>1</sup> This article provides an account of two cycles of an action-research project aimed at developing rural language teachers' teaching skills. The project, funded by TRANSNET, and implemented by the Research Institute for Education Planning (RIEP) at the University of the Free State (UFS), focuses primarily on the sciences (natural science, technology, and mathematics) in an outcomes-based education framework. In 2004/2005, the scope was widened to include English, given the impact of learner proficiency in the medium of instruction on learning in other learning fields.

## 1. Introduction

Jones and Thornborrow (2004: 399-423) contend that interactional floors, talk and the organisation of classroom activities are intimately related. The teacher's enactment of any classroom activity, they argue, determines the kind of floor to be constructed. Thus, they hold the view that turn-taking mechanisms and interactional sequences are typical of the activities in which they occur. In fact, the aim of their study was to shift the focus away from a notion of the conversational floor as a "turn" or as "speaking," and toward an account that treats "the floor" as a way of organizing whatever activity is going on at any given moment (Jones & Thornborrow, 2004: 400).

This view is not entirely new; other researchers have focused attention on the action-guiding nature of teachers' speech acts, among others, attention-getters, metastatements, conclusions, response demands, response-regulating talk, goal-defining utterances and response-evaluating teacher turns (Greyling, 1995, 1993, 1990 and 1987; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, 1992; Marcondes de Souza, 1983: 49 and Mehan, 1985; Sinclair and Brazil, 1982), and that the teacher is the only participant in the context of the classroom to direct and control speakership (McHoul, 1978). Dorr-Bremme (1990: 379-402) argues convincingly that teachers use contextualisation cues to signal the boundaries of various activities in the classroom discourse. We argue that teachers use contextualisation cues, especially discourse markers, such as *OK*, *Alright*, and *Right*, to signal changes to the floor. Moreover, the teacher's superordinate position is predicated not only on the notion that "only teachers can direct speakership in any creative way" (McHoul, 1978: 188), but also on the **normative orientation** that both teachers and pupils recognise these teacher-dictated rules of interpretation and rules of production when, as classroom participants, they engage in interaction. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to explore the normative orientation of teacher talk as a genre<sup>2</sup>: the primary rule, identified by McHoul (1978: 188), is that the teacher has the right to design activity-specific interactional floors and participation structures consciously to pursue predefined learning ends.

A second aim of this study is to show that discursive data from classrooms may serve as interpretable evidence of teacher constructs-in-action and the interactional floors they design to achieve these learning ends. These aims are related too to the notion that teachers' study of their own classroom discourse may assist them in enhancing their levels of conscious choice and critical-reflective practice (cf. McCarthy, 1991; Van Lier, 1996: 68-69; Wallace 1998).

## 2. Methodological orientation

For the sake of brevity, we provide an outline of the key methodological aspects that were considered in planning and executing the project.

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<sup>2</sup> Bhatia (1994:16) posits four requirements for a genre. First, a genre encapsulates communicative purposes which are recognised by a specific professional community. Second, it refers to a conventional and highly structured communicative event. Moreover, there are constraints on the allowable contributions that members of the community may make. Last, the latter constraints are exploited by expert members to achieve their intentions within the framework of socially recognised purposes (cf. also Swales, 1990). Teacher talk is an emergent genre, redefined continually by the technical creativity of teachers who actively pursue learning ends. Following Fairclough's (1995) arguments, we argue that much heterogeneity obtains in the genre known as teacher talk. Homogeneity in a text, Fairclough (1995: 8) argues, refers to semantic and formal consistency and uniformity, while heterogeneity refers to variation in the discursive operations that are encapsulated in texts and text types. Here we consider the notion that heterogeneity in teacher talk is contingent on activity-specific discursive operations.

First, we provide a narrative on the **focal events of two cycles in an action-research project**. Both cycles were driven by the researcher's conscious selection of training activities to achieve the purposes outlined above. The so-selected language learning activities could be placed in a medial position on the continuum between the poles of the  $\pm$  **discursive initiative construct**. The first activity focused on a **text-based dialogue mediated by the teacher and the learners** within local-allocational, teacher-directed Initiation-Response-Feedback exchanges. In transcribing and analysing the discourse collected for activity 1, the researcher noted his turn-by-turn control of the discourse. The intention was then to move away from turn-by-turn control in an activity in which boundary-restricted teacher control of the learners' discursive contributions would be used. The two cycles followed the **look-think-act reflective process** (cf. Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart & Zuber-Skerrit, 2002: 125-131; Zuber Skerrit, 2002: 1143-125; Stringer, 1996; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; McNiff, 1978).

Second, we selected the **notion of floor**, taken from conversation analysis, as a frame for discussing the discursive data collected for the two cycles of the project (Jones and Thornborrow, 2004; Mchoul, 1978; Psathas, 1995; Sacks Schlegoff and Jefferson, 1974). Interactional floors refer to various teacher-directed configurations of participants whose rights and roles are defined by the teacher on the basis of constructions such as those outlined in the paragraphs that follow directly after the next.

Third, **data-collection and analysis** were performed on the basis of CA methodology, primarily McHoul (1978) and Sacks et al. (1974). A strictly technical analysis was not performed; rather, a turn-by-turn transcription was produced, and then specific excerpts were analysed more closely for the interplay between verbal and non-verbal speech acts.

Next, we used the **constructs  $\pm$  discursive initiative and local-allocational versus boundary-restricted teacher mediation speech acts** to select activities, and the teacher-student interactions were seen as a source of discursive evidence. The activities selected for analysis come from a range of activities midway on the continuum between the poles of the  $\pm$  **discursive initiative construct**. At the one end of the continuum, the teacher's tight control over classroom discourse yields minimal learner responses (as in audio-lingual lessons), while at the other end, the teacher structures learner freedom to engage in problem-based learning that yields conversation-like discourse (cf. Johnson, 1995).<sup>3</sup> These constructs are defined on the basis of aspects of similarity and difference when two or more classroom events or experiences are compared (cf. Kelly, 1955 and 1958, for the methodological procedure).

Yet another aspect was captured in three specific researchers' work: **VanPatten's input processing, Brinton and Holten's (1997) reading sequence, and Spady's feedback loop**. The two selected activities were embedded in a reading-based approach intended to operationalise VanPatten's notion that comprehensible input (cf. Krashen, 1981, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) is not enough; rather, "those strategies and mechanisms that promote form-meaning connections

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<sup>3</sup> The notion "unpredictable" denotes unpredictable turn content. It is the turn-taking mechanisms in classrooms and conversation that have a high level of predictability because in the former the teacher designs the participation structure, while in the latter, Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson's (1974) rule system applies in a local-allocational sense when transition relevance places occur in the discourse. See Demo (2001) for a step-by-step discourse analytic process for studying communication patterns in classrooms.

during comprehension" have to be applied (VanPatten, 2002: 240-258; cf. Batstone, 2002: 11/1: 14-29 for a contending view; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993). For this reason, the materials used in the project followed a specific sequence, based on Brinton and Holten's work, ranging from pre-reading to while- and post-reading activities, emphasising comprehension and form-meaning relations in texts. Moreover, following the suggestions of Spady (1994, 1997) and Schwahn and Spady (1998), as well as the injunction of the DoE to promote learner autonomy and applied competence, these materials were designed so that they contained feedback loops for self-directed learning and practice (cf. RSA, MoE, Government Gazette, February 2000, Vol. 415, no. 20844, p. 7). In addition, they were also sequenced and scaffolded to promote comprehension-driven processing instruction (VanPatten, 2002, 240-258; Bruner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

Finally, we argued that for the sake of the replicability of the study, we had to record how **we had embedded the activities within the larger framework of the materials** for the course. In both cycles, the sessions commenced with reading. In the first cycle, the reading text was on two-headed snakes; in the second, two fables entitled "The Frogs asking for a King" and "The Fox and the Monkey" were used. The materials require learner reading, including specific information-gap exercises on the content. In addition, learners are exposed to the processes of activating prior knowledge (i.e. pre-reading), engaging in while-reading activities such as mind-mapping; and post-reading activities ranging from analytical activities (i.e. comprehension questions on specifics from the texts, sentence beginnings and endings based on the texts, true/false comprehension questions, and inserting synonyms and antonyms for underlined words in the texts) to synthetic activities requiring discourse-level learner responses (i.e. summarising a text in 2, 8 and 25 words, exploring what-if statements, engaging in communication-gap and role-play exercises, stating an opinion, and dramatising the fables). Against this backdrop, the two activities consciously selected for purposes of eliciting classroom discourse for the medial position on the continuum of the  $\pm$  **discursive initiative construct** were the following:

(1)

Learners read a text on two-headed snakes. Then, in groups and to promote comprehension, they exchange information on the text. Next, the teacher mediates a joint dialogue between an expert and a non-expert on these snakes.

[Cf. various web sites on two-headed snakes, among others, the BBC at the following URL:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/animals/newsid\\_1910000/1910927.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/animals/newsid_1910000/1910927.stm)]

(2)

In these materials teachers are required to engage in a role-play exercise, involving the Fox and the Monkey. They are given two scenarios: (2.1) In pairs, prepare a dialogue between the Monkey and the Fox **before** the Monkey was caught in the snare. (2.2) In pairs, prepare a dialogue between the Monkey and the Fox **after** the Monkey was caught in the snare.

[Cf. <http://www.literature.org/authors/aesop/fables/>]

In conclusion, we have to acknowledge that the constructivist premises of this study prompt us to present this account of the data as one of many possible constructions. From Kelly's perspective (1955; 1958), we argue that our findings too have been "constructed" in terms of pre-selected researcher/facilitator constructs. This implies that alternative constructions of the same data are possible, either in the sense of generating new meanings, or in the sense of producing contending interpretations.

### 3. Findings

The discursive evidence collected in the cycles showed that the teacher designed the floor for activity-specific teacher-trainee participation. Consistent with McHoul (1979) and others (such as Shotter, 1993; Zimmerman and Boden, 1991: 5, Wilson, 1991: 22-43, and Goffman, 1959: 101), we found that teacher control was a constant in the classroom. The teacher employed specific speech acts to direct learner action, controlling the interactional floor.<sup>4</sup> We generate a normative description of the participants' turn-by-turn sequencing

(3)

Speakers	Turns	Turn-by-turn transcription
T	1	OK, let's just take a look at how we are going to do this. You will see on page 24 of the set of notes that there is a text on snakes. Have you got that text there?
Ss	2	Yes.
T	3	Now, I want you to turn over the page.
Ss	4	(NV – they do so)
T	5	There's a heading that says, "Two-headed snakes". OK?
Ss	6	Yes.
T	7	I would like you to read that section on two-headed snakes. OK? Read that section.
Ss	8	(Students page through the notes – there is some confused talking)
T	9	The section on two-headed snakes.
Ss	10	(Students are reading, and some talk, and inaudible questions.) [While students read, the teacher identifies two students to take up the roles for which turn content is going to be generated. Five minutes are allocated to the reading task. The two students are asked to go up front to tape recorder two, which is to be used to record the negotiated dialogue.]
T:	11	Have you read it?
Ss	12	[NV reacts]

Following the notion of sequential implicativeness,<sup>5</sup> we viewed the entire excerpt in (3) as a cluster of floor-creating action-guiding speech acts, which are also termed prefatory speech acts or **presequences**, aimed at preparing the interactional floor for the main discourse of the session. These presequences include **attention-getting boundary markers**, such as OK<sup>6</sup> and Now, employed

<sup>4</sup> One of the advantages of conducting classroom discourse studies is that, as Van Lier (1989 and 1996) has pointed out, they serve as an estrangement device, providing classroom practitioners with a detached perspective as they seek a conscious awareness of the action-guiding aspects of classroom discourse which are required to construct learning events (cf. Marcondes da Souza, 1983).

to focus trainees' attention on how the activity is to be completed (turn 1), turning the page in the notes (turn 3), directing attention at the objective of the lesson, namely, jointly to construct a dialogue, and specify the roles of expert versus non-expert on snakes as the sociolinguistic framework for participants to contribute to the classroom discourse (turn 13-19). Moreover, OK is used as a checking speech act, with rising intonation, to confirm learners' understanding of the various elements and steps in the process (turns 5, 7, 13).

The **normative sequencing** of these speech acts is orientated to the three-part IRF sequence which is endemic to classroom instruction (Cf. Greyling, 1995, 1993, 1990 and 1987). The teacher's OK in turn 1 is an attention-getting speech act, which presupposes a non-verbal trainee *react* (to use Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, terminology). Given the authority position of the teacher, he is entitled to comment (i.e. provide a negative evaluate) at the appropriate transition relevance place on completion of the trainees' react. This would then constitute a well-formed initiation (i.e. an attention-getting speech act by the teacher) followed by a learner react (attention-giving speech act by trainees). If a well-formed two-part sequence of this kind is generally not followed by the third-part evaluate but by a next initiation, the participants interpret the omission as implicit and positive feedback on the appropriateness of the preceding second-pair part. However, if the trainee react is inappropriate or dispreferred, the teacher may repair the trainees' non-compliance. Let us consider turns 1 to 4, which may be transcribed more precisely as a cluster of presequences:

(4)

- |    |   |       |  |
|----|---|-------|--|
| T  | 1 | (1.1) | OK [an attention-getting boundary marker]  |
| Ss |   | (1.2) | [Non-verbal react]   |
| T  |   | (1.3) | Let's just take a look at how we are going to do this. You will see on page 24 of the set of notes that there is a text on snakes.<br>[A task-directed meta-statement] |
| Ss |   | (1.4) | [Students page to the required text – NV react]  |
| T  |   | (1.5) | Have you got that text there? [A checking speech act]  |
| Ss | 2 | (2.1) | Yes. [Affirmative speech act]  |
| T  | 3 | (3.1) | Now I want you to turn over the page.  |
| Ss | 4 | (4.1) | [NV react]   |

<sup>5</sup> Sequential implicativeness refers to the logical connectedness of speech acts in a well-formed discourse. Thus, the participants in the discourse interpreted the follow-up reference to a text on snakes in the set of notes as relevant to the teacher-trainer's intention to explain how the learning activity had to be performed. Sequential implicativeness is echoed in CA notions associated with preference organisation (Levinson, 1983: 332-345; Bilmes, 1988: 161-181) and the co-operative principle proposed by Grice (cf. Levinson, 1983: 101). For more on presequences in the classroom, see Mazeland (1983).

<sup>6</sup> The uses of OK in various discursive contexts are discussed by Condon (1986: 73-101). In this study, OK was used as an attention-getter (with falling intonation), a checking speech act (signalled by rising intonation and marked by a ?), and an evaluation act (as a third-part accept/acknowledge/evaluate act).

Thus, on the basis of this analysis, the following presequences may be identified in the first three turns-at-talk:

(5)

**Category 1: An attention-getting boundary marker followed by an appropriate non-verbal learner react**

T 1 (1.1) An attention-getting boundary marker  
Ss (1.2) Non-verbal react

**Category 2: A task-directed speech act followed by a non-verbal react**

T (1.3) An informative task-directed meta-statement  
Ss (1.4) Non-verbal react

**Category 3: A meta-level checking act followed by an affirmative verbal response**

T (1.5) A meta-level checking speech act  
Ss 2 (2.1) Affirmative speech act

**Category 2: A task-directed speech act followed by a non-verbal react**

T 3 (3.1) Now I want you to turn over the page.  
Ss 4 (4.1) Non-verbal react

Turns 5 and 6, as well as 11 and 12, may be placed within the categories of sequences outlined above. To reinforce this point, let us perform a more detailed analysis of turns 5 and 6:

(6)

**Category 2: A task-directed speech act followed by a non-verbal react**

T 5 (5.1) There's a heading that says, "Two-headed snakes".  
Ss (5.2) [Non-verbal react]

**Category 3: A meta-level checking act followed by an affirmative verbal response**

T (5.3) OK?  
Ss 6 (6.1) Yes.

Interestingly, turns 11 and 12 replicate a category 3 sequence, with a difference: instead of a verbal response, the trainees provide a non-verbal react to signal that they have completed the reading. With respect to turns 7 to 10, we could argue, on the basis of preference organisation, that turn 8 is a **dispreferred response**. Turn 9 would then be a clue, directing learners' attention to the appropriate text to be analysed, which is intended to elicit an appropriate non-verbal learner react. In this extended sub-cluster of presequences, the teacher employs a repair strategy yielding two new categories of presequences:

(7)

**Category 4: A task-directed speech act followed by a non-verbal react**

T 7 (7.1) I would like you to read that section on two-headed snakes.

Ss (7.2) [Non-verbal react]

**Category 5: A meta-level check (7.3) followed by a dispreferred non-response (7.4), and a repair sequence consisting of a clue (9.1) and a non-verbal react (10.1)**

T (7.3) OK?

Ss (7.4) [Dispreferred non-response]

T (7.5) Read that section.

Ss 8 (8.1) (Students page through the notes – there is some confused talking)

**[Dispreferred response]**

T 9 (9.1) The section on two-headed snakes.

Ss 10 (10.1) (Students are reading, some talk, and inaudible questions are asked)

Turns 13 to 19 may be seen as a further cluster of presequences in which the teacher prepares trainees for the task to be completed (*We are going to construct a dialogue and we are going to negotiate the turns to be recorded* (turn 13)); moreover, the framework for appropriate learner contributions to the IRF exchanges derives from the teacher-assigned roles of snake expert (turns 15 and 17) and non-expert (turn 19). The meta-communicative focus is captured in the following sequence:

**Category 6: A teacher directive re role-specific responses followed by verbal responses from trainees (Cf. turns 13 to 16)**

Thus, in the presequences leading up to the main discourse, the teacher (as superordinate and authority figure who has **floor-design rights**) sets the scene for a specific kind of floor. What may we deduce about the floor designed by the teacher in the presequences in turns 1 to 19? First, trainees are required to obtain **background knowledge on two-headed snakes** to be able to make contributions to a dialogue that has to be consistent with the roles of an expert and a non-expert on two-headed snakes ( $\pm$  **the snake expert construct**). Second, the teacher and the trainees are required to **negotiate the turns** between the expert and the non-expert, with the trainees having to contribute sociolinguistically appropriate turns (exhibiting sequential implicativeness). Third, the teacher has to talk about the dialogue, making **meta-communicative judgements** about the appropriateness of trainees' contributions to the dialogue.

Then follows the main discourse in turns 20 to 130. The data show that there continues to be a significant focus on **meta-communicative teacher speech acts**. Let us consider this dimension in turns 19 to 21:

(8)

T 19 Now, what would Lerato say to initiate the conversation? (Elicitation speech act)

S1 20 **Hello, Tabo.** [Verbal response act]

T 21 **Hello, Tabo.** [T writes the line on the board.] [Verbal accept] OK, are you happy with that? Is that a good way to initiate? [Elicitation speech act]



- Ss 22 [several] Yes. [Verbal response act]  
 T 23 OK [Verbal accept]

It is clear that the participants are engaging in meta-talk as they talk about the appropriateness of the lines that Lerato and Thabo are supposed to use in the ± snake expert roles, in this case a typical **greeting-greeting sequence**. The exchange evolves on the basis of the traditional **elicitation-response-evaluate** or IRF exchange (with turn 19 the elicitation, turn 20 the response, and turn 21 the teacher accept). Once the two-part greeting-greeting sequence has been negotiated, the teacher stops proceedings, directing learners to record the two lines. The rest of the mediated dialogue, comprising question-answer sequences, is typically negotiated as follows:

- (9)
- S6 39 *Have you ever heard of or seen a two-headed snake?* [T opts for **Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake?** (silence as he writes). And what will he then say? [elicitation]
- Ss 40 (several simultaneous responses) Yes. [response]
- T: 41 **Yes, of course,**
- S7 42 I saw it/
- T 43 **/I have.** [evaluate] But, let's record it. Let's record it. [T walks to tape recorder.] OK? So, Lerato is going to – when I switch it on – Lerato is going to take that turn [T points at utterance on the board.] and Tabo will then follow up. OK, let's go. [elicitation]
- S1 44 **Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake?** [response]
- S2 45 **Yes, of course, I have.** [T switches off the tape recorder.] [response]
- T 46 So, we have part of our dialogue as we recorded it. [evaluate] OK?

In turn 39, student 6's suggested turn is edited by the teacher to *Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake?* The teacher question is then what the snake expert's response would be. Here, like elsewhere, the teacher uses unobtrusive correction, changing the learner's suggested I saw it to the more grammatical *I have*.

In turn 43, the teacher refers to the process of recording the negotiated **question-answer sequence** captured in turns 43 to 46 (see the boundary marker *But* and the check *OK?*). Interestingly, we have to note that turns 44 and 45 constitute a **response** to the teacher's **cue** (*Let's go*), while turn 46 represents a teacher **accept** that the **recorded question-answer sequence** constitutes an appropriate response.

Thus, the exchanges have a meta-communicative focus and are orientated to the elicitation-response-evaluation exchange as the teacher and the trainees engage in **three floor-defining acts**. First, the teacher expects trainees to generate the turns of a well-formed discourse. Second, the teacher adopts a meta-communicative focus reflecting on and editing the so-produced turns. Third, once the so-edited and negotiated turns are acceptable to the teacher, he embarks on an elicitation-response-accept exchange to record the dialogue. The teacher's mediating meta-

communicative control is pervasive in the form of boundary markers or contextualisation cues (such as *OK*, *But*, *Alright* and *Now*)<sup>7</sup>, checking moves (turns 21, 28, 46, 59, 61, 63, 66, 99, 101), clues (turns 54, 82, 84, 92, 94, 107, 115), teacher-controlled extended sequences (turns 30-43; 46-59; 76-88), unobtrusive correction (turns 42-43), explicit correction (turns 85-86), talking about the process of generating the dialogue (turns 68-73; 118), and a recorded audio-version of the mediated dialogue (played back to the trainees, and transcribed in turns 119-128). These linguistic resources were the means used by the teacher **to design and control the interactional floor at a local-allocational level (from one turn to the next) for the activity in question.**

The next cycle of the action-research project involved a controlled role-play activity based on a fable, "The Fox and the Monkey". In this activity, **the teacher used meta-communicative action-guiding acts only at boundaries in the discourse.** While learners acted out their dialogues, the teacher recorded their responses, without exercising meta-communicative control of any kind over turn content in the trainee dialogue. Let us consider the opening teacher turn:

(10)

1 Teacher: OK, could I have your attention please. So, we are going to go on to this exercise, now. Remember there are two dialogues that you have to prepare. The first one is a dialogue where the monkey and the fox uhm engage in interaction before the monkey is caught in the trap, and the second one is where the uhm the monkey has been caught in the trap and responds to what he regards as the fox's deceptive behaviour.

Ss [Five minutes of preparation time]

Right, could I have your attention? Could I have your attention, please? Just for a moment. Could I have your attention please? Decide which dialogue you would like to present, not both, just one. OK? Now you decide which one you would like to present.

Ss [Five minutes of preparation time]

OK, are you ready? I think what we are going to do now is I would like you all to listen to the group or the pairs that we are going to record. OK? We are going to start at this end, and we are going to record seven dialogues. OK? Let's start over here.

In this opening teacher move, we notice meta-communicative control in the form of attention-getting *OKs* and a *Right*, as well as metastatements outlining the two role-plays, presenting trainees with a choice between the two dialogues, checking on trainee understanding of the directive talk, and establishing a floor where all trainees have the opportunity to act as participants and audience to one another. The facilitator uses meta-communicative speech acts only at boundaries in the discourse, attempting to prompt learners to move away from the prepared text of the dialogue (turn 12), requesting silence and attention (turn 31), or nominating the next pair (see turns 12, 22 and 31).

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<sup>7</sup> See also the various action-guiding functions of the word *OK*, outlined earlier in the text, directly after the excerpt in (3). Cf. footnote 6.

The typicality of each activity-specific floor is outlined in the table below:

**Table 1: The typicality of two activity-specific interactional floors**

<b>Aspect of comparison</b>	<b>Activity 1: Mediated dialogue</b>	<b>Activity 2: Role-play exercise</b>
Meta-communicative control	Meta-communicative action guiding acts <b>occur from one turn to the next.</b>	Meta-communicative action-guiding acts occur <b>at boundaries only.</b>
Teacher-mediating speech acts	Local-allocational turn-by-turn control of exchanges.	Boundary-restricted teacher control
Discursive initiative of trainee	<b>Controlled and constrained</b> by the accepted trainee contributions to the dialogue: focus on well-formed adjacency pairs in the dialogue.	<b>Controlled and constrained</b> by the framework for the dialogue. Unique discursive contributions are produced by the various pairs.
Communicative focus	<b>Controlled teacher-mediated practice</b> pervades the lesson.	<b>Learner-generated dialogues</b> are produced, but not as real-time events
Real-time constraints	<b>Teacher-mediated activity</b> – the constraints of producing real-time communication do not apply.	<b>No real-time constraints</b> apply to the activity – trainees are given time to prepare their dialogues.
Acts of meta-communicative control	<b>Teacher speech acts:</b> Attention-getters Checks and task-directed informatives and directives Cues, prompts and clues Extended sequences Rephrasings	<b>Teacher speech acts:</b> Attention-getting boundary markers Checks and task-directed informatives and directives

Thus, in sum, we argue that the distinguishing characteristics of the floor created in each activity are related to the teacher-trainer's action-guiding speech acts. In the first, they occur not only at boundaries, but throughout the discourse. In the second, these action-guiding teacher speech acts are manifested only at boundaries in the discourse, but most prominently in the first turn taken by the trainer.

#### 4. Implications for the project and teacher training

These findings suggest that teachers' discourse competence will determine how they construct activity-specific interactional floors. Teachers are required to have adequate discursive control over classroom processes so that they may facilitate the learning process. Put differently, if teachers do not have adequate discursive control to create activity-specific floors, they will be unable to transfer the gains of teacher upgrading (or teacher training) to their classrooms. From a needs analysis point of view, teacher trainers consistently have to ask what kind of discursive competence trainees require to be able effectively and efficiently to implement new methods, approaches, principles and techniques. We argue that teacher training should not only raise the target population's awareness of their classroom-specific communicative competence, but also **actively develop their range of discursive control** so that they will **be able consciously to construct a wide range of activity-specific interactional floors** for the classroom.

#### 5. Teacher intentionality, discursive control and the wider context of the teacher-upgrading project

One of the primary aims of the study was to show that the teacher could consciously and intentionally construct activity-specific interactional floors. Likewise, the teacher-researcher intentionally selected **Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** as an organising principle in the intervention: In **activity 1**, the intention was to establish a level of difficulty as a first step. The outcome – the second step – was that teacher-mediated learner talk was produced. **Activity 2** did not focus entirely on the third step associated with the ZPD, namely, independent learner performance (Moll, 1994: 7; cf. Van Lier, 1996: 190-199; Vygotsky, 1978). In the second activity, the facilitator argued, trainees worked independently (without teacher mediation), but were not required to produce real-time interactional exchanges. In a follow-up cycle, synthetic and experiential activities (i.e. communication-gap activities requiring real-time learner-learner exchanges) could be used. Learners could then be expected to produce on-the-spur-of-the-moment, goal-directed discourse (cf. Prabhu, 1989: 45-46), replicating real-life communication, which would then be the ultimate test of independent performance on the continuum of the + **pole** of the **discursive initiative construct**.

A second focal point, intentionally selected, was Bruner's scaffolding. The shift from pervasive teacher control of the discourse in activity 1 to boundary-restricted teacher control in activity 2 (with some learner autonomy), supplemented by a further cycle in which trainee responses were subject to real-time constraints and novel on-the-spur-of-the-moment learner-learner exchanges, was seen as an example of three steps in a consciously selected scaffolding strategy (Bruner, 1979), constituting a shift from teacher mediation and learner dependence to learner autonomy.

A third aspect, once again pursued as part of the teacher-researcher's conscious choice, was to focus not only on **reading as comprehensible input**, but also on **input processing**. Following the notion that comprehension is critical to learning, we included reading as a preparatory step in almost all teacher-upgrading activities, including the two activities reported on in this paper (Krashen 1981, 1982; Krashen and Terrell, 1983). In all instances, our training focused on language as goal-directed text. We opted in the activities in the course to develop trainees' awareness that processing aspects of form was important to access meaning within an input-intake-output learning process. A collection of 13 activity types, illustrating this concept, was designed around a fable, *The Frogs asking for a King*, and used as part of the workshop-based training.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has shown that language activities require teachers to construct activity-specific floors. Of course, different teachers will construct different interactional floors for the same activity. It has been shown that a key tool in raising teachers' awareness of how they construct activity-specific floors is to record, transcribe and analyse the discourse they co-produce with their learners. Classroom discourse may serve as evidence not only of teachers' acts of faith as they pursue activity-specific language learning ends, but also of their classroom-specific discourse competence.

In sum, the study prompted several questions: Are teachers trained to exercise appropriate meta-communicative control as they pursue activity-specific learning ends? How does meta-communicative control vary among teachers who claim to have adopted the same teaching methodologies, say, a communicative, task-based or participatory approach? How can classroom discourse studies be used to identify lack of alignment between teacher intentions and classroom events? How conscious are teachers of the constructs that drive their interactions? How can teacher trainers actively develop trainees' range of discursive control so that they will be able consciously to construct a wide range of activity-specific interactional floors?

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank RIEP for inviting me onto the project, especially Lorraine Botha for her focused leadership, as well as Elizna Prinsloo and Kobus van Breda for logistical and other support. I would also like to thank my colleague, Arlys van Wyk, for her support and enthusiasm. Their – and the full team's – commitment to teacher-upgrading has been exemplary and inspirational.

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**Appendix A: The process of mediating and negotiating a dialogue**

Speakers	Turns	Turn-by-turn transcription
T	1	OK, let's just take a look at how we are going to do this. You will see on page 24 of the set of notes that there is a text on snakes. Have you got that text there?
Ss	2	Yes.
T	3	Now, I want you to turn over the page.
Ss	4	(NV – they do so)
T	5	There's a heading that says, "Two-headed snakes". OK?
Ss	6	Yes.
T	7	I would like you to read that section on two-headed snakes. OK? Read that section.
Ss	8	(Students page through the notes – there is some confused talking)
T	9	The section on two-headed snakes.
Ss	10	(Students are reading, and some talk, and inaudible questions.) [While students read, the teacher identifies two students to take up the roles for which turn content is going to be generated. Five minutes are allocated to the reading task. The two students are asked to go up front to tape recorder two, which is to be used to record the negotiated dialogue.]
T	11	Have you read it?
Ss	12	[NV react]
T	13	OK, we are going to construct a dialogue. OK? But we are going to negotiate the turns that are going to be recorded over there. OK? So, who is the expert on snakes between the two of them, do you think?
S	14	[inaudible]
T	15	Who is going to be the expert on snakes? Anyone of them.
Ss	16	(Chorus) Tabo.
T	17	So, Tabo is going to be the snake expert. [T writes on the board] So, Tabo is a snake expert. And Lerato...
Ss	18	[No response – 5 seconds wait time]
T	19	[writes] ... is not. [T states.] She's not an expert in the field. Now, I would like you to put together a dialogue between Tabo and Lerato, based on the information in that section. How would you do it? The first speaker – I'm going to identify the first speaker – the first speaker is going to be Lerato. [T writes on the board, indicating the format of a dialogue]. Now, what would Lerato say to initiate the conversation?
S1	20	Hello, Tabo.
T	21	Hello, Tabo. [T writes the line on the board.] OK, are you happy with that? Is that a good way to initiate?
Ss	22	[several] Yes.



- T 23 OK, and what do you say?
- Ss 24 [chorus] Hello, Lerato. [T writes the second line of the greeting-greeting sequence]
- T 25 Hello, Lerato.  
OK, let's record the dialogue up to that point. So, she's going to say, "Hello Tabo" and he's going to say, "Hello Lerato". [T writes on the board, then switches on the tape recorder]
- S3 26 Hello,Tabo.
- S4 27 Hello, Lerato.
- T 28 And we stop there [T switches off the second tape recorder.]  
So, we've got the first part, the first two lines of our dialogue have been recorded. OK? Are you happy with that so far?
- Ss 29 Uhm
- T 30 So, who do you think is the next person going to be? It'll probably be Lerato.
- S5 31 Do you know anything about snakes?
- T 32 She knows that he knows about snakes.
- S5 33 Oh.../.
- T 34 /OK.
- S6 35 Do you ever heard of a two-headed snake?
- T 36 Have you ever heard /
- S6 37 Have you ever seen a two-headed snake?
- T 38 Have you ever ... seen or heard?
- S6 39 Have you ever heard of or seen a two-headed snake? [T opts for Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake? (silence as he writes). And what will he then say?
- Ss 40 (several simultaneous responses) Yes.
- T: 41 Yes, of course,
- S7 42 I saw it/
- T 43 /I have. But, let's record it. Let's record it. [T walks to tape recorder.] OK? So, Lerato is going to – when I switch it on – Lerato is going to take that turn [T points at utterance on the board.] and Tabo will then follow up. OK, let's go.
- S1 44 Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake.
- S2 45 Yes, of course, I have. [T switches off the tape recorder.]
- T 46 So, we have part of our dialogue as we recorded it. OK? So, let's take a look at the next turn. Lerato would then say?
- S6 47 Where/when.../(inaudible)
- T 48 OK. When did you...?
- S6 49 (inaudible)
- S8 50 OK, where did you – let's use another word ?

S9	51	/Where did you see.../
T	52	Where did you encounter two-headed snakes. Now take a look. What response would it get?
Ss	53	(no response)
T	54	Take a look at the details.
S9	55	At the St Louis...
S10	56	/zoo (inaudible)
T	57	Ok, is that what we/
Ss	58	Yes. (T walks to board, writes out the utterance)
T	59	I saw a two-headed-snake at the St Louis Zoo (as he writes out the words). OK, now let's record those two lines – are you happy with those lines?
Ss	60	Yes.
T	61	You are happy that we it's it's a logical dialogue? Logical?
Ss	62	Yes.
T	63	OK, so, are you ready? [Directed at two students who are about to record the next two lines.] Ready to go? [T switches on tape recorder.]
S1	64	Where did you encounter two-headed snakes?
S2	65	I saw a two-headed snake in the St Louis Zoo.
T	66	[T switches off the tape recorder]. Happy so far?
Ss	67	Yes.
T	68	You see that we are constructing a dialogue? And it is based on a text.
Ss	69	Yes...uhm
T	70	How did you get the information?
S2	71	You read.
T:	72	You read – you read the passage.
Ss	73	Yes.
T	74	OK? OK, let's ... you want to extend the dialogue?
Ss	75	Yes, sir.
T	76	Let's add on. Let's add on. We must add on. What would Lerato then say?
S5	77	(inaudible)
T	78	What would you say – (inaudible) it is a curious snake it is sort of obvious that there are two heads? Would she want to know more about it?
Ss	79	Yes.
	80	What would she say to find out more about it about that snake?
S7	81	What it looked like?
T	82	What it looked like. OK, we know what it looked like.
Ss	83	(inaudible)
T	84	(inaudible) Let's just take a look here. (T reads:) Can you tell me more about...?

Ss	85	about it/
T	86	about it ... that two-headed snake (T refers back to the phrase "a two-headed snake, to point out pronoun concord). So, it is one snake, so therefore we have to use "it".
Ss	87	Yes.
T	88	OK, are you with me?
Ss	89	Yes, sir.
T:	90	What answer would he give?
S6	91	(no response)
T:	92	What answer would Tabo give?
S	7	93 (various responses)
T:	94	Take it from the text.
S8	95	(inaudible)
T	96	It was about three feet long and lived for two and a half years. OK, let's let's record the dialogue up to that point. OK, are you ready? Let's listen to what they have to say.
S1	97	Can you tell me more about it?
S2	98	It was about three feet long and lived for three-and-half years.
T	99	OK. Is it correct so far?
Ss	100	(chorus) Yes.
T	101	Are you happy with it? OK, what would Lerato then say?
Ss	102	(3 second wait time)
T:	103	How long did it live?
Ss	104	Two-and-a-half years.
T	105	That's rather short, isn't it?
Ss	106	(chorus) Yes.
T	107	Why don't you ask the question?
Ss	108	(3 second wait time)
T	109	Why did it live for only two-and-a-half years? Why did it survive for only two-and-half years? OK.
Ss	110	(various attempts are made)
T:	111	Did I hear a different... (nominates) you give me the formulation?
Ss	112	(inaudible)
T	113	(Why was its lifespan so short? OK, and what would Tabo say?
Ss	114	(inaudible response)
T	115	Let's recap. That when they feed, what happens? The two heads compete for the food. And the two heads will then sort each other out. OK, the two heads fight over food, and so it kills itself – it kills itself in the process. OK, there you are, let's record it. Let's record it. Are you ready?
S1	116	Why was its lifespan so short?

S2	117	The heads fight over food; so, it kills itself in the process.
T	118	That's our dialogue. See we negotiated the whole process, we negotiated what you put in, we talked about the stages and you can intervene and put in (inaudible) if it's an incorrect sentence, you can correct the sentence, the model ... the language that they give you that you work with. [Looks at two volunteers] Thanks very much – it's you can take your seats again. Thank you very much for your participation. (T rewinds the cassette, and plays the recorded dialogue from tape recorder 2).
S1	119	Hello Tabo
S2	120	Hello Lerato
S1	121	Have you ever heard of a two-headed snake?
S2	122	Yes, of course, I have.
S1	123	Where did you encounter two-headed snakes?
S2	124	I saw a two-headed snake in the St Louis Zoo.
S1	125	Can you tell me more about it?
S2	126	It was about three-feet long and lived for two-and-half years.
S1	127	Why was its lifespan so short?
S2	128	The two heads fight over food; so, it kills itself in the process.
Ss	129	All the students clap hands, cheering the participants.)
T	130	OK, have you got it? [Returns to previous theme of discursive initiative]. Now, take a look at this. It was controlled, wasn't it?

### Appendix B: Role-play exercise

Turn	Participant	Turn-by-turn transcription
------	-------------	----------------------------

- |   |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
| 1 | Teacher: | OK, could I have your attention please. So, we are going to go on to this exercise, now. Remember there are two dialogues that you have to prepare. The first one is a dialogue where the monkey and the fox uhm engage in interaction before the monkey is caught in the trap, and the second one is where the uhm the monkey has been caught in the trap and responds to what he regards as the fox's deceptive behaviour. |
|---|----------|--|

[Five minutes of preparation time]

Right, could I have your attention? Could I have your attention, please? Just for a moment. Could I have your attention please? Decide which dialogue you would like to present, not both, just one. OK? Now you decide which one you would like to present.

[Five minutes of preparation time]

OK, are you ready? I think what we are going to do now is I would like you all to listen to the group or the pairs that we are going to record. OK? We are going to start at this end, and we are going to record seven dialogues. OK? Let's start over here.

**Pair 1:**

- 2 Student 1: (as Fox) Congratulations, Monkey. I have a fabulous interesting present uh for you stored somewhere in a cave.
- 3 Student 2: (as Monkey) Thank you, Fox, I can't wait till you give it to me.
- 4 Student 1: (as Fox) Come, let's go. I'll show you where it is hidden.
- 5 Student 2: (as Narrator) [[S2 gives narrative comment]: Both of them go into the cave, but it is very dark inside. The Fox does not venture further than the opening.]
- 6 Student 1: (as Fox) It is over there, Monkey! And it is all yours!
- 7 Student 2: (as Monkey) Ouch! Help me, Fox!
- 8 Student 1: (as Fox) Ah-ha! You stupid Monkey, I've got you! Did you think you could be our king?
- 9 Student 2: But, I thought you were happy for me! Why did you mislead me?
- 10 Teacher: OK, that 's the first dialogue.
- 11 Class: [Spontaneous hand-clapping from rest who had been listening]
- 12 Teacher: OK, I would like you to move away from your prepared text, but they got the idea. OK? The next one – let's go on to the next one. Not ready yet? OK, I'll come back to you in a moment. OK, let's listen to this pair over here. Shall I go there? Just pull that along for me, please (as he pulls recording equipment along with him). OK, let's listen to this one, please.

**Pair 2:**

- 13 Student 1: (as Fox) I wish to congratulate you on your performance. You are great indeed.
- 14 Student 2: (as Monkey) You are welcome.
- 15 Student 1: (as Fox) I have something for you as a present - as a token of appreciation.
- 16 Student 2: (as Monkey) I can't wait to get the present.
- 17 Student 1: (as Fox) You know what, my grandpa left me a treasure when he died, I think it is it will be a pleasure if I can present it to you as a present.
- 18 Student 2: (as Monkey) Oh! I like presents and surprises.
- 19 Student 1: (as Fox) Can I show you the way to the treasure?
- 20 Student 2: (as Monkey) Let's go.
- 21 Student 1: (as Fox) Then, follow me!  
[They make sounds of the two walking off.]
- 22 Teacher: There you are. They did it, they did it. [Moves to next pair] Your dialogue. Can you do it again please?

**Pair 3:**

- 23 Student 1: (as Fox) Hi, Monkey, I have heard that you have been elected as king of the Animals.
- 24 Student 2: (as Monkey) Hi, you Fox, yes exactly, I'm your king, but I know that you didn't vote for me.
- 25 Student 1: (as Fox) No, your Highness, come and enjoy and have some fun.

- 26 Student 2: (as Monkey) [Cries out in pain] You are a criminal. Why do you want to kill me? But I know that you will never be a king!
- 27 Teacher: OK, OK, [midst laughter] that's their version of it.  
That's their version. Have you got something? OK, who else?
- 28 Students [Inaudible, but indicate that they are ready]
- 29 Teacher: Are you ready over there?
- 30 Students: [NV indicate that they are ready]
- 31 Teacher: OK, let me just carry this along. [NV – moves into position]  
OK, could we have silence please? Let's listen to this one.

[For the sake of space, only 3 out of 6 dialogues are quoted here. The only meta-communicative intervention after turn one was to direct the groups to participate, with several *thank you's* for learner participation].

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