

A CASE STUDY OF A TEACHER'S QUESTIONS IN AN ENGLISH SECOND
LANGUAGE (ESL) CLASSROOM

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION (ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE)
of Rhodes University

by

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December 1998

ABSTRACT

This research study seeks to explore and understand the way a Form C (the third year of high school) teacher asks questions in an English second language (ESL) classroom in a high school in Lesotho.

As this is a small-scale study on a teacher's questions in a familiar setting, an ethnographic stance was adopted. The researcher adopted the role of non-participant observer, recorded three different lesson types and took observational notes. She transcribed the lessons and used the transcription to

interview both the teacher and the students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. She then analysed the classroom and interview data and invited the teacher to respond to the analysis she had made. The interview was also recorded and transcribed.

The findings indicated that the teacher asked most questions in the three lesson types. He asked mainly lower order question. However, the nature of the questions varied according to the intentions of the teacher, even when the lesson type was the same.

Although it is difficult to generalize from a small-scale study like this one, it is believed that this study has been beneficial in raising awareness about the nature and role of questions in classroom interaction, and also in raising awareness of the teacher. Consciousness raising may be essential to educators and researchers. Moreover, this research may enable educators to theorize their practice.

This research demonstrates the need for teacher development. It argues that knowledge should be linked with the skills. Therefore, it proposes the need for teacher education to include an explicit focus on questioning since questions are an integral part of teaching and learning. It further proposes the need for teachers to plan their questions carefully as good questioning strategies may facilitate learning.

To my knowledge, existing research on teachers' questions has not linked the cognitive, linguistic and pedagogic functions of teachers' questions. This study draws from literature on these three areas while acknowledging the importance of taking into account contextual issues in analysing teachers' questions. It therefore concludes that, content, curriculum, and the teacher's intentions and his/her ideologies cannot be ignored in the study of a teacher's questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all who assisted me during the course of this research study.

First, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support of my supervisor, Ms Sarah Murray, whose guidance, patience, encouragement and constructive comments have been of tremendous help throughout the research process. She was always available and ready to discuss the progress of the study with me.

I am also very grateful to the principal where this research was done, the Form C teacher of English and his pupils, for their willingness to participate in this research. I have been fortunate in working with them because their co-operation made the research work easier.

I also wish to thank the Head of the Education Department, Dr George Euvrard and the librarian, Judy Cornwell, who made it possible for me to use the library and its facilities.

My sincere thanks go to my husband, Molise Nhlapo, for his support and encouragement. He never complained about my long absence when I was studying.

I should like to express my gratitude to my friend, Emese Kun Jager, for her artistic and computer skills. I would not have been able to create the tables for the appendices without her assistance.

I am also indebted to Monica Hendricks, for her keen interest and willingness to edit this piece of work. Without her editorial assistance, commitment, and determination to help, it would have been very difficult for me to do this piece of work on my own.

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CHAPTER 1

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study of a teacher's questions that was conducted in a high school in Lesotho. It begins with the context of research, and explains what prompted the researcher to conduct the research. It then moves on to describe Lesotho's educational system and finally the structure of the study.

1.2 CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

The focus of this research arose out of my experience as an English Second Language (ESL) teacher at St Agnes High School in Lesotho for almost six years, a marker of ESL Junior Certificate (JC) examinations for three years and a postgraduate student at Rhodes University for one year. As a teacher, I always asked questions to cover what was in the syllabus and drilled students on the answers. However, I never questioned what I taught, the way I taught things and why I taught things and especially the role of questioning in my teaching. During my time as a marker, I found that the nature of questions in examinations and the way they were phrased was a constant source of complaint. The Bachelor of Education course (Philosophy in Education) which I did at Rhodes University in 1997 had provided me with some insights into what I do, why I do things and the way I do things and I wanted to use these insights in my research.

During my undergraduate training at the National University of Lesotho (NUL), I received no training on how to ask questions, especially in an ESL classroom. However, the marking experience I have gained made me value the use of questions and questioning strategies. So, I sought to understand and explore the way a Form C (equivalent to Grade 10) teacher asked

questions in ESL classrooms in my own school. The aim was to analyse the type of questions asked by an ESL teacher in his or her classroom, in a Southern African context, to explore the reasons underlying the use of different question types and to analyse the way in which the teacher used questions to scaffold learning.

I hoped that the study might help me and other teachers in Lesotho and elsewhere to have a better understanding of the way in which we ask questions, and the effects questions have on classroom interaction and students' learning.

In preparation for the research to be undertaken, I conducted a pilot study in an ESL class in a high school in Grahamstown. The purpose of the pilot study was to enable me to get used to certain research techniques such as classroom observation, recording, transcribing interviewing, analysing, and writing up data in order to make up a research report.

1.3 THE LESOTHO EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Lesotho formal education system is in some ways a typical colonial one, modelled on that of the United Kingdom (UK). There is, however, a longer tradition of literacy than in many other African countries - the first school was established in 1833 and a vernacular newspaper appeared in 1862 (Stuart *et al* 1997). This system consists of seven years of primary education, culminating in the Primary Leaving School Certificate (PLSC), at the end of Standard 7. This is followed by the local JC, taken after three years, in Form C, and two years of senior secondary education, with the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC), giving access to the university at the end of Form E (Mats'ela 1982).

Surprisingly, since 1983, the education system has not changed much. Unusually, education is seen as “a three-way partnership between the government, the churches and the communities” (Stuart et al 1997: 167). The administrative, financial and academic control of the formal education system is vested in the Ministry of Education. The Ministry draws up guidelines for teachers’ training, administers examinations, reviews and authorizes curricula, opens and closes schools, and pays teachers’ salaries, with the exception of NUL which is administered by an independent board although the Ministry provides the bulk of its recurrent budget (Mats’ela 1982). The three major church denominations who still own most of the schools and instil their ethos are the Christian Missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (now LEC), the Roman Catholic Church and English Church (now ACL). The communities, on the other hand, sometimes take the initiative to build schools (Stuart et al 1997).

Likewise, the secondary school core curriculum has not changed much over the years. It consists of the following subjects: English, Sesotho, Mathematics, Science (including Biology, Chemistry and Physics), History and/or Social and Development Studies or Geography and of the following practical subjects: Agriculture, Home Economics, Technical Drawing, Basic Handicrafts, Accounting, Commerce and Typing (Mats’ela 1982). However, some schools have accommodated other subjects such as Religious Knowledge, French, Business Administration and a few others.

Bearing in mind that each subject has its own syllabus, in order to come to a better understanding of the English syllabus, I have provided a context which traces its origin.

1.3.1 ENGLISH IN LESOTHO

Since Lesotho's independence in 1966, English has been the official language and Sesotho the national language of the Basotho. Although there are other ethnic languages such as Tembu, Ndebele, Phuthi and Zulu, no languages other than English and Sesotho are at present officially recognized (Khati 1993). In education, the medium of instruction is Sesotho up to Standard Four and English from Standard Five, although English and Sesotho are taught daily throughout primary schooling (Mats'ela 1982). During secondary schooling, both English and Sesotho are taught as subjects although English is the only medium of instruction.

Therefore, "in the taxonomy of English-using societies" (Arthur 1994: 64), English is assigned to the ESL category, based on the need to answer examination questions, which are all in English, except when Sesotho is examined as a subject. The importance attached to English in Lesotho's education system is underscored in the examination sector survey of 1982 where the task force (in Mats'ela 1982) reports that in the terminal examinations for both primary and secondary education, English weighs 65% with Mathematics, and the other subjects 35%. Moreover, as Sekoati (1998: 2) puts it:

despite being no longer a prerequisite in its country of origin, Britain, that for students to pursue certain careers should pass English by credit, the language is still being stringently used as a barricade to stop Basotho students from exposing their academic talents and exercising their capacities in various fields of development subjects.

And those who fail or get a mere pass in English, despite having credit passes in other subjects, cannot study any further; they cannot be accepted by the university or the colleges to pursue the subjects of their choice in which they have credits. Likewise, if students fail English in Form C, regardless of having passed the other subjects, they fail. Evidently, the importance and status of English in Lesotho cannot be ignored.

1.3.2 THE ENGLISH SYLLABUS

The English syllabus for Form C consists of the following prescribed texts for 1998, drama (Tobias and the Angel), novels (Crocodile Burning and I am David) and poetry, all of which form Paper I (set books). Paper II focusses on letter writing and composition writing, both of which are guided or situational. The third paper consists of grammar or language and a comprehension passage, which has content, vocabulary and multiple choice questions.

The poems are taken from Growing up with poetry edited by David Rubadiri, under two sections, 'Death and ancestors' and 'Freedom.' The overall number of poems to be covered in these sections is 21. Roy Campbell's, 'The Serf,' which was the poem taught by the teacher in one of the lessons in the study, falls under 'Freedom' and its central theme is resistance of an ordinary person to slavery and oppression.

1.4 THE SETTING

1.4.1 THE SCHOOL

My research site is an Anglican school that was established in 1953. It is in the northern part of Lesotho, approximately 35 kilometres from the capital town, Maseru.

This school offers all the subjects which are in the core curriculum mentioned earlier, except Religious Knowledge (which is ironic since this is a church school), French and Business Administration.

Admission into the school is based on the performance of the students in their terminal PSLC and JC examinations. As already stated, English is an important part of the examination. Thus,

students in the school can be assumed to have a reasonable proficiency in English.

The teacher who was observed is a graduate whose major field of study is ESL. He has taught in this school since 1996 and was my colleague for almost one year. He has been teaching the class that was observed from Form A (Grade 8). The class that was observed was made up of thirty-six students, seventeen girls and eighteen boys. Both the teacher and the students shared the same first language background, Sesotho, but the main medium of communication and instruction was English.

1.5 POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN LESOTHO

During the time that I was carrying out the study, there was political instability in Lesotho. The instability was a result of the irregularities in the May general election in Lesotho. These irregularities created tensions between the members and supporters of the opposition parties and the democratically elected government, Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). As tensions built up, they affected the way the country was run, particularly in relation to the schools. For example, schools in Maseru were temporarily closed while others, like my research site were on and off. So, the instability directly affected the way I carried out the research. This will be illustrated in the methodology section.

1.6 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This research report consists of five chapters, each of which have subheadings. The present chapter provides an introduction to the research and provides the background to what prompted the research, the goals of the research, the background to the formal education system, the setting, research participants and the researcher and the structure of the thesis. The second chapter

presents literature focussed globally and locally on teachers' questions in ESL classrooms. The third chapter presents the way I carried out the research, focussing on the research techniques and methods adopted and the rationale for adopting such methods and techniques. Chapter four discusses the findings that emerged in the three lesson types observed using the three forms of analysis (linguistic, cognitive and pedagogic). In order to draw together the threads, it provides the picture that emerged in the three lesson types and what the findings tell us about the study of a teacher's questions. The final chapter, based on the discussion, draws together the literature and the findings, the value of this study, its limitations and a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses literature on teachers' questions reported both internationally and within the Southern African context. It begins with a brief theoretical overview of research that has been reported on teachers' questions in second language (L2) classrooms and examines reasons why questions are so commonly used in teaching and the contexts in which they are asked. Given the importance of questioning as a teaching strategy, the chapter also surveys the type of questions teachers ask in their classrooms and the contribution those questions make during classroom interaction. The chapter further attempts to answer the question: of what benefit are those strategies to someone acquiring a second language?

2.2 RESEARCH ON TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

Research indicates that teachers, whether in content classrooms or language classrooms ask many questions (Ellis 1993). In their study of six ESL teachers, Long and Sato (1983) found that 938 questions were asked by teachers in six elementary ESL lessons. Young (1992: 90) states that "persistence of questioning is a favourite teacher methodology, that roughly 60% of all classroom talk comprises questions and nearly all of them are asked by teachers."

However, O'Neill (1991) argues that very few studies have focussed on the way teachers ask questions in ESL classes. This is specially true of South Africa. Although Krause (1997), for example, addresses the significance of teachers' questions during classroom interaction in the L2 context, this is not the main focus of her study. Macdonald (1990) sees questions as central to the active and meaningful reception of concepts but she does not analyse classroom interaction

in these terms.

Internationally, researchers such as Chaudron (1983), Long and Sato (1983) and Pica and Long (1986), have dealt with teachers' questions. Their work has guided my study in a Southern African context and helped me justify why teachers use questions in their classrooms.

2.3 WHY TEACHERS ASK QUESTIONS?

Research indicates that questioning is one of the most familiar techniques used by teachers in their classrooms (Dillon 1990). Different researchers provide various reasons why this is so. For example, Ellis (1992) proposes two reasons why teachers ask questions in their classrooms. First, questions require responses and, therefore, they serve as a means of obliging learners to contribute to the interaction. Learners' responses also provide the teacher with feedback which can be used to adjust content and expression in subsequent teacher-talk. Second, questions serve as a device for controlling the progress of the interaction through which a lesson is enacted. It has been found that questions can also be used to motivate students, to revise, control, test or assess, explore, explain, encourage students to focus on a particular topic, elicit information, check understanding and to control behaviour (Young 1992; Richards and Lockhart 1994).

Nunan and Lamb (1996: 81) warn researchers that "questions do not necessarily serve one function." Nunan and Lamb point out that a question to elicit information may be directed (for purposes of control) to a student whose attention is wandering, and only an extended context would show whether a question was designed to elicit information or check understanding. What is more crucial though is that the type of question asked might determine the nature of information the teacher would like to elicit from students.

2.4 TYPES OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

Van Lier (1988: 222) claims that “a substantial proportion of classroom research has focussed on the kinds of questions teachers ask.” Other researchers have observed that there are many ways to classify questions, and as a result, they argue that it is sometimes difficult to arrive at discrete and directly observable categories (Richards and Lockhart 1994). Although I will adapt three broad categories of questions for my frame of analysis based on the work of Bloom (1956), Long and Sato (1983) and ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986), I will review literature on teachers' questions generally to provide a broad theoretical context for my study.

In the past, the most common method for analyzing classroom discourse in cognitive terms has been categorizing teacher questions on some cognitive scale (Cazden 1988). Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive domain has been the most widely used resource for cognitive question types. The cognitive taxonomy, which describes the objectives relating to knowledge, intellectual abilities and intellectual skills has been found useful in defining outcomes (Hunkins 1972). It describes a hierarchy of six categories - knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom 1956; Woolfolk 1984). The taxonomy attempts to answer the question: what kinds of knowledge are we seeking to develop? Although, I will summarize these categories, Appendix A1 (a condensed version of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives) and A2 (samples of the categories) will be attached for elaboration and clarification. In the following paragraph, a summary of those categories provided by Bloom (1956) and Woolfolk (1984) is given.

Knowledge questions require students to recall the information as it was learnt. This means that students have to access knowledge of specific terminology, facts (dates, events, people, places

etc.), knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics, conventions, trends and sequences, classifications and categories, methodology and criteria and so on. Unlike knowledge questions, comprehension questions require students to demonstrate understanding of the material. Such questions require mental reorganization or interpretation, not just recall while application questions require students to use information to solve problems. Analysis questions require students to think critically, identify reasons, motives and make an inference based upon several pieces of information. On the other hand, synthesis questions require students to put together elements and parts so as to form a whole while the category of evaluative questions involves making judgements and offering an opinion to evaluate a product or idea.

Bloom's taxonomy is divided into 'lower order' questions and 'higher order' questions. Bloom describes lower order questions as those that comprise of knowledge, comprehension and application while higher order questions include analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

However, Bloom's taxonomy has been criticized on the grounds that the categories are too broad and some topics, such as personal qualities, have no space within it (Carter 1985). Another criticism has been that the taxonomy does not distinguish between knowledge and skills, by which Carter means that Bloom does not distinguish between knowing how to do something and being able to do it.

Although research has validated the educational benefits of teachers' asking more "higher order" questions, it has also been observed that categorizing teachers questions on their cognitive value is hard to do (Cazden 1988). What makes it difficult is that all categorizations depend on the distinction between questions that request factual recall or literal comprehension and questions

that require more complex inferential cognitive work to go beyond the information easily available in memory or text. Therefore, categorizing teachers' questions, Cazden believes, creates problems for both the teacher and researcher because a lot of variation in cognitive impact is not a result of the frequency counts of question types. The variation may create analytic problems to the researcher who tries "to decide the import (to the student) and the intent (of the teacher) of any question considered" (Cazden 1988: 100). Cazden maintains that while the context under which the student responds may affect the answer that the student provides, the real intent of the teacher's question may often be clear only from her or his subsequent evaluation of student answers.

Another distinction that is commonly drawn is that between "open" and "closed" questions (Barnes 1969). Barnes states that while "closed" questions are framed with only one possible answer in mind, "open-ended" questions permit a number of possible answers. However, Edwards and Furlong, cited in Cazden (1988) warn researchers of the problem they might face in trying to distinguish between "closed" and "open-ended" questions. Edwards and Furlong, cited in Cazden (1988: 101) point out:

many questions which appear to be open are closed because of the context in which they are asked (perhaps the teacher has recently provided "the" answer), or because the teacher has clear criteria of relevance or adequacy or correctness of expression to which he refers in evaluating the answers.

Edwards and Furlong cite one of Barnes' examples to illustrate their point: what can you tell me about a Bunsen burner, Alan? They argue that this sounds completely open, but, as the lesson ensues, it becomes clear from all possible statements about a Bunsen burner that the teacher is seeking a particular statement about the conditions for luminous and non-luminous flames.

In line with Edwards and Furlong, Barnes also points out that many questions have the appearance of being open while in actual fact they are closed and calls questions that are open in form but demonstratively closed in function “pseudo” questions. Barnes also distinguishes four types of questions: factual questions (‘what’ questions), reasoning questions (‘how’ and ‘why’ questions), open questions that do not require any reasoning and social questions that influence student behaviour by means of control or appeal.

While Bloom’s and Barnes’ classifications take into account the cognitive nature of questions, other question taxonomies consider the syntactic structure and interactional function structure of questions. Examples of such classification are drawn from Kearsley (1976). Kearsley’s classification, as given by Long and Sato (1983), includes echoic and epistemic questions. Echoic questions ask for the repetition of the utterance, for example, ‘pardon me?’ Questions which serve interactional function are further broken down into comprehension checks, clarification requests and confirmation checks. While the comprehension checks test the questioner’s ability to be understood, for example, ‘Is it clear to everyone?’, the clarification requests help the addressee follow what the speaker says, as in, ‘Excuse me, what do you mean by that?’ Confirmation checks serve to assure the interlocutor that their inference or interpretation of the communicated ideas is correct, for example, ‘Did you say ‘he’?’ (Makhobotloane 1992).

On the other hand, epistemic questions are divided into expressive, rhetorical, display, and referential questions. Expressive questions often convey attitudinal information to the addressee, for example, ‘Are you coming or aren’t you?’ Contrary to expressive questions, in rhetorical questions, the questioner sometimes does not require or expect an answer from listeners, but may answer his or her own questions, as in, ‘Why did I not do that?’ Because I ...(Long and Sato

1983).

Much as the epistemic questions have been divided into four sub-topics mentioned above, the use of ‘display’ and ‘referential’ questions (Long and Sato 1983) has received considerable attention in recent years, with the growth in concern for communication in classrooms. Display questions ‘test’ the learner by eliciting already-known information while referential are genuinely information seeking. However, it has been observed that referential questions “are likely to be open while display questions are likely to be closed, but it is possible to conceive of closed referential questions and open display questions” (Ellis 1993: 5).

Research on teachers’ questions shows that in classrooms of all kinds, display questions are by far the most common (Nunan and Lamb 1996). Long and Sato (1983), in a study of six ESL teachers, found that teachers used significantly more display questions than referential questions in classrooms, compared to native speakers (NSs) in conversations with non native speakers (NNSs) (Chaudron 1988). Pica and Long (1986) also found that L2 teachers asked more display questions than referential questions. It was also found that in lessons using a content-based approach to teaching, display questions also predominate (Ellis 1992). Early, cited in Chaudron (1988) also reports that the ratio of display questions to referential questions with ESL social studies students was almost 6 to 1 (but only 1.5 to 1 for teacher speech to L1 Grade 11 and 12 social studies students). Johnson (1990), cited in Ellis (1992) found that 60% of questions asked by three teachers in content classrooms were display. In her study of three English-speaking teachers and 37 ESL students, Makhobotloane (1992) found that teachers used more display questions even though the approach to teaching was communicatively oriented.

However, research also shows that there is considerable variation among teachers (Ellis 1992).

Long and Sato's study shows that in naturalistic discourse, referential questions are more frequent than display questions, whereas display questions are more frequent in whole-class teaching in ESL classrooms (Richards and Lockhart 1994). On the other hand, Johnson's study indicates that one teacher divided her questions more or less equally between display and referential (Ellis 1992).

Several investigations have been carried out into the effects of display and referential questions (Nunan and Lamb 1996). Some researchers argue that display questions are less likely to contribute to an acquisition-rich environment than are referential questions (Ellis 1992). As a result, they strongly recommend that language teachers aspire to using as many referential questions as possible in their classes. Responses to referential questions tend to allow learners to take more responsibility in their learning (Brock 1986, cited in Nunan and Lamb 1996). Moreover, with their focus on meaning, referential questions would facilitate language acquisition they are more likely to result in extended learner responses (Ellis 1992). In her study, Brock concludes that teachers need to be trained to increase the number of referential questions they ask and that this increase could prompt students to provide significantly longer and syntactically more complex sentences.

However, not all researchers agree that the distinction between display and referential questions is a useful one (Nunan and Lamb 1996). Van Lier (1988), for example, asserts that the distinction is irrelevant, as the function of teacher questions is to elicit learner language. According to Van Lier, whether or not the teacher already knows the answer is irrelevant. He states that both display and referential questions are critical to the management of the learning process. He

therefore concludes that the choice of question should depend on the objectives of the lesson, the size of the class and the particular pedagogical imperative driving the management of the learning process at that particular time.

Another classification of teachers' questions is by Thompson (1997) . He categorizes questions according to their form, content and purpose. According to Thompson, some questions take into account the grammatical form of the question, that is whether it is of yes/no type or wh- type. It is believed that yes/no questions can be directed to weaker students or to check basic understanding before moving to wh- questions to elicit more detailed information

The second dimension relates to the content of the question: whether it is about outside facts, personal facts or opinions. In his research, Thompson recommends that teachers need to invite their learners to talk about themselves rather than only talking about the information provided by the textbook. Thompson concludes that personalization allows learners to have some degree of control over the input, which may lead to increased motivation and more investment by the learners in the process of learning. However, Thompson warns researchers that personalization does not necessarily mean that real communication is taking place, hence he proposes another dimension, purpose.

The third dimension relates to the purpose of the question: whether it is for display or communication. It is argued that language teachers in recent years have realized that "they are primarily teaching a means of communication rather than a specific topic of communication" (Thompson 1997:101) and as a result they have realized that their subject allows them to ask about a great many other things.

Although various research has used taxonomies of questions, only a few studies have concentrated on the purpose for which questions are asked, which is going to be the focus of my research. While I am going to argue that the classification is important, I am also going to claim that the purpose plays a more important part in teacher questioning.

Another classification of classroom teachers' questions relates to the pedagogic aspect which examines the way in which questions are used to 'scaffold' learning. Scaffolding is rooted in the Vygotskian idea that what children could do on their own is not as important as their potential for development realized in what they could do with others. Scaffolding informs us of the new approaches to teaching and learning. It is a teaching "device which requires that pupils actively participate in the creation of shared knowledge, rather than merely sit and listen to the teacher talking" (Edwards and Mercer 1987: 143). This means that the teacher should play a facilitating role while the learner shares responsibility for producing a complete performance with an adult. The teacher should work within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978:86).

The term scaffolding was coined by Bruner and his colleagues to refer to the process by which the competent adult or peer "lends consciousness" (Bruner 1986: 74) to a child who does not have it on his or her own. Cazden (1992) distinguishes between two kinds of scaffolds, vertical construction, in which the adult asks for additional new information in each utterance and gamelike routines, in which the adult helps to hold each previous utterance in focal attention.

In his research, Moll (1990: 13) shows how teachers of bilingual classes used questions to scaffold the learning of a comprehension passage:

As part of their questioning, the teacher helped the students examine the writer's strategies and the relationship of these strategies to the reading process: for example, how we interpret what we are teaching, our feelings about the character and why, predictions about the unfolding events in a story and how writers utilize descriptions or dialogues to influence the reader.

Edwards and Mercer (1987) provide a brief summary of the notions of 'scaffolding' and of the 'zone of proximal development.' They acknowledge that for these two concepts to occur, there should be some form of guidance by a competent peer or adult and the process should be in the form of guided discovery, followed by internalization by means of a competent individual who can perform alone, or in new contexts, activities and conceptualizations which could be achieved only with the teacher's help. They state that there should be a 'handover,' process in which the knowledge and competence of the adult is eventually possessed by the child (Edwards and Mercer 1987).

In their research, Roehlar et al (1987) suggest that teachers may be effective if they use effective explanations to mediate students' attempts to make sense of reading. They suggest that through the questioning strategies, the teacher can ask students questions to predict the text. Thus, the teacher can help students acquire skills, transfer those skills to other learning tasks or activities, and help learners to assume responsibilities for their own learning.

Apart from question types, research on classroom teachers' questions has also examined the frequency of the different types of questions. Studies have focussed on the length of time the teacher is prepared to wait for an answer, the nature of the learners' output when answering

questions, the effect of the learners' level of proficiency on questioning and the variation evident in teachers' questioning strategies (Ellis 1993).

2.5 THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

In an attempt to understand how students learn a second or foreign language, researchers focus on the role of questions during classroom interaction and the role these questions play in SLA. Researchers are concerned with what is generally regarded as the major source of input and have examined the strategies teachers use in their classrooms in order to negotiate meaning (Day 1986). Before I discuss what are regarded as sources of input, and questioning as one of the strategies teachers use to provide input, I will start with a view of the relationship between input, classroom interaction and SLA.

2.6 THE NOTION OF INPUT

One of the key elements in the successful learning of a second or foreign language is reported to be the input the learner receives in the target language (Krashen 1982). Ellis (1985: 127), defines input as "the language that is addressed to the L2 learner either by a NS or by another L2 learner." According to Allwright and Bailey (1991) this language is what learners read or hear. Thus, the L2 learner gets exposed to the target language at school by interacting with teachers or peers who speak the language well enough. In Lesotho, input to most children is limited to their classroom experience. This is due to the inadequacy of informal exposure to radio, television, authentic use in communicative contexts, and so on (Khati 1993). It can be argued that the amount and quality of this target language environment is poor and therefore not conducive to meaningful and fast learning of the language. This makes the quality of input which learners receive in the classrooms even more important.

Krashen (1982) makes a distinction between acquisition and learning. The former refers to a subconscious process of ‘picking up’ a language while the latter refers to the conscious learning of the target language. According to the theories of input and interaction, questions serve as a source of input during interaction (Long and Sato 1983).

2.6.1 SOURCES OF INPUT

Researchers are concerned with what is regarded as the major source of input and thus they examine strategies which teachers use in order to provide learners with input. One of the strategies that was investigated was the use of questions. It was argued that the learner’s linguistic environment serves as input to his or her developing grammar (Chaudron 1988). During formal instruction, teachers use ‘foreigner talk’ (Long and Sato 1983) to provide learners with input. Foreigner talk is a variety of language similar to that which mothers use with young children. Thus, some researchers investigated the extent to which teacher speech (foreigner talk), especially through the use of questions provide input essential to SLA.

2.6.2 QUESTIONS IN INTERACTION

Questioning is one of the strategies which teachers use to provide learners with input during classroom interaction. It is believed that questions “provide one means by which, in conversation between participants of unequal status, the dominant member exercises and maintains control of interaction” (Long and Sato 1983:). Thus, questions are more or less universal characteristic of classroom interaction. Mizon (1981) and Early (1985) both cited in Chaudron (1988), found that teachers used questions more with nonnative speaking students than NSs. The reason for this is that questions probably facilitate interaction by clearly establishing both the topic and who is expected to speak next (Long 1981, cited in Chaudron 1988). However, Long acknowledges that

the nature of questions may severely limit the possibilities for students to respond at any length, if at all. He maintains that although students' failure to respond to teachers' questions may result from their lack of knowledge or limited second language proficiency, researchers have been concerned with influencing teaching practices, studying how teachers construct questions in less vague and restrictive forms.

Studies on teachers' questions reveal that certain types of questions (comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification checks) "have the specific function of maintaining interaction by ensuring that interlocutors share the same assumptions and identification of referents" (Chaudron 1988: 130). Thus, Chaudron states that researchers have investigated these questioning acts, to determine the extent to which those questions improve the interaction by promoting more student negotiation, again in accord with the theory that more negotiated interaction would enhance L2 acquisition.

Long and Sato (1983: 275) comment that these three types of question indicate "the direction of information-flow in preceding utterances." Long and Sato conclude that if measured for both teacher and students, these types should contribute to an index of interaction or negotiation in the classroom.

Both Long and Sato (1983) and Pica and Long (1986) compared classroom teacher's use of these three question types in beginning-level classes. In both Long and Sato's and Pica and Long's comparisons, confirmation checks and clarification requests were fewer than comprehension checks, regardless of teacher experience.

On the other hand, Thompson (1997: 100-101) argues that certain kinds of questions, especially yes/no can encourage “interaction, especially if learners are shy or hesitant. Once they have committed themselves that far, it is easier for them to continue the interaction by answering the follow up question which, of course needs a fuller response.” Moreover, questions of this nature cue responses and make it possible for learners to gain confidence and take turns in conversation without producing long stretches of language . Furthermore, such questions, Thompson argues, promote interaction in that they check basic understanding of a text before moving on to wh-questions to elicit more information. Thompson, therefore suggests that questions of this nature be asked as a basis for more abstract questions, which, according to Bloom, are referred to as higher order questions.

Ellis (1992: 42), for example, points out that “questions require responses and, therefore, they serve as a means of obliging learners to contribute to the interaction.” Learners’ responses also provide the teacher with feedback which can be used to adjust content in the subsequent teacher-talk. Therefore questions “serve as the principal way in which the teacher maintains control over classroom discourse” (Ellis 1990: 78). As observed by Chaudron (1983) questions help the non-native speaker to interact (an essential task of the ESL classroom teacher) and they are also used to focus on topical relationships, especially in the classroom setting where they break down the lesson into manageable units.

Furthermore, questions are especially important in ESL classes because they “play a significant role in ‘foreigner talk’” (Long and Sato 1983: 269). Foreigner talk (input adjusted to the learner) is a modified register which NSs use to address the NNSs. It is believed that during foreigner talk, teachers use questions either to modify or simplify the language which they address to

language learners.

2.6.3 MODIFICATION OF QUESTIONS

It is believed that teachers modify their language to NNSs (learners) either by repeating or rephrasing their questions (Chaudron 1988). White and Lightbown (1984), cited in Chaudron (1988) found that three secondary ESL teachers asked up to four questions a minute, without receiving any response even after they had repeated the questions nine times. However, they conclude that more difficult questions need to be repeated several times.

Another way of modifying the questions is by rephrasing questions as “alternatives” (Nuttall 1996: 185) or choice questions: is a trout a fish or a bird? Long (1981), cited in Chaudron (1988) found that alternative questions occurred twice as much in NS-NNS interactions than in NS-NS ones.

According to the interactional hypothesis, “interactional modifications which are directed at solving a communication difficulty help to make input comprehensible and comprehensible input promotes acquisition” (Long 1983, cited in Ellis 1992: 40). According to this claim, an acquisition-rich environment is characterized by high frequencies of confirmation checks, comprehension checks, clarification requests and other repetitions (Ellis 1992).

2.6.4 SIMPLIFICATIONS OF QUESTIONS

As stated earlier, another way to make the language accessible to the learner is through simplifying the questions (Ellis 1992). However, he observes that the degree of simplification relates to the learners’ level of proficiency.

Chaudron (1983) found that during foreigner talk, teachers use questions to simplify their speech to aid students learning. The simplified input is crucial in helping learners to segment the speech flow into phonological and grammatical units (Ellis 1992). As observed by Schmidt (1990), cited in Ellis (1992: 40), acquisition depends on learners being able to ‘notice’ linguistic features in the input because “acquisition depends on the ability to identify words and phrases.”

Therefore, Ellis concludes that teachers need to simplify their speech although they do not need to be aware of the precise state of their students’ L2 knowledge. As discussed earlier, teachers can use yes/no questions because they are short and easier to answer (Thompson 1997). Chaudron (1983) found that questions may simplify teachers’ speech. However, he observed that a primary difficulty with the simplification approach is that the digression into practical knowledge often appears to obscure the general point. Moreover, he observed that while ‘procedural questions’ (Richards and Lockhart 1994) and obliquely logical questions “may conform to the teacher’s notion of simplified structuring of knowledge, they may not be the simplest logical step for the learner of ESL” (Chaudron 1983: 135).

Despite these shortcomings of simplification, questions are considered important during foreigner talk. As observed by Long and Sato (1983: 169), “questions are thought to facilitate and sustain participation by NNS.” For example, they signal speaking turns to the NNS, make conversational topics salient and compel the NNS to participate. Moreover, Long and Sato observed that certain kinds of questions, especially ‘yes/no’ or ‘alternative’ questions are particularly easy because they require only confirmation or denial of a fully encoded proposition.

Therefore questions are said to play an important part in foreigner talk, which serves to make

language input comprehensible to learners. In their study of 10 ESL teachers, Pica and Long (1986) sought to find out what is generally regarded as the major source of input for L2 learners. They compared the teacher talk of experienced and inexperienced teachers and examined the characteristics of teacher talk and teacher-student conversation and to determine if teacher talk is learnt over time (Pica and Long 1986). They found that ESL classroom conversations are different from informal, non-instructional NS-NNS conversations in the amount of negotiation for meaning. They concluded that this difference in the amount of negotiation for meaning might indicate that there is less comprehension of input by students in the ESL classroom.

In looking at teacher talk of beginning and experienced teachers, they found some differences and concluded that similarities are greater than differences and that the influence of the classroom context is strong enough to outweigh the effects of teaching experience. They suggest that their findings provide little comfort to those who look to the ESL classroom as the major source of input and subsequent interlanguage development. They argue that if the nature of the tasks in ESL classrooms were to involve more opportunities for a two-way exchange of information, probably combined with small group work, this state of affairs could be modified.

However, in their study of six ESL teachers, Long and Sato (1983) conclude that questions can make great quantities of linguistic input comprehensible and offer the NNS more speaking opportunities. Long and Sato (1983: 270) also argue that “access to comprehensible input and opportunities to use the target language for communication purposes are probably the minimum requirements for successful classroom SLA.”

Therefore, ESL classroom questions have been found to have both a pedagogic and a language

learning function. As a result, some educators and researchers recommend that more attention be paid to them in both research and teacher education (O'Neill 1991; Thompson 1997). Ellis (1993) states that teachers' questions provide an excellent opportunity to marry SLA research with pedagogical concerns of language teachers. One of these concerns is feedback.

2.7 FEEDBACK

Feedback is the aspect of classroom interaction which includes the notion of error correction (Chaudron 1988). It has been found that teachers use mostly comprehension checks as a way of getting feedback in classrooms. As we have discussed earlier, feedback plays an important part in error correction which ultimately contributes to learner production. So, questions are essential during the teaching and learning process.

In the South African context, the Threshold Project research (Macdonald 1990: 3-4) revealed that both certain kinds of questions formulated in English, and the way in which teachers ask questions are central concerns when curriculum change is enacted in the classroom.

2.8 CONCLUSION

Although there has been much of research on teachers' questions, few studies have been conducted in ESL classrooms. Research also shows that there are various question types and patterns although the distinction is not as important as the purpose for which those questions are used. It has also been found that questions play a major role in classroom interaction and foreigner talk in that questions contribute to the input essential for language acquisition. Therefore questions are important in ESL classrooms and if teachers make use of them, input can be negotiated and comprehended.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on ethnography as a method of inquiry used in classroom process research in order to understand the way a Form C teacher asks questions in ESL classrooms. It begins with a rationale for using classroom process research in ESL classrooms and the way ethnographies “could be utilized in investigating processes of teaching and learning in the classroom” (Nunan 1992: 91). It then provides a brief discussion on the principles of ethnography and justifies the use of ethnography as a method of inquiry in language classrooms.

Although I will discuss the principles of a good ethnography, it is worth noting that my research is not fully ethnographic: while it seeks to understand classroom processes in context and from multiple perspectives, it is not longitudinal in the way of fully fledged ethnographies. In this, it is typical of much small-scale, classroom process research.

3.2 CLASSROOM PROCESS RESEARCH

I adopted classroom process research because it “is concerned with the careful description of the interpersonal events which take place in the classroom as a means of developing understanding about how instruction and learning take place” (Ellis 1990: 65). The purpose was to study a teacher’s questions in ESL classrooms, and classroom process research aims at documenting the events that take place in an ESL classroom. I observed and explored how a teacher at a high school in Lesotho asked questions in ESL classrooms and kept records of events to enhance my understanding of how teachers and learners “accomplish classroom lessons” (Gaies 1983: 206). I therefore used a form of ethnography as the method of inquiry to investigate my concerns.

3.3 ETHNOGRAPHY

I adopted an ethnographic case study stance for this research to “obtain insights into the classroom as a cultural system through naturalistic, uncontrolled observation and description” (Nunan 1992: 3). I believed that adopting an ethnographic stance would enable me to describe observable behaviour within the context in which behaviour occurs, as the setting has a significant role on the behaviour. I sought to understand and explore the way a Form C teacher asked questions in ESL classrooms. The aim was to analyse the type of questions asked by an ESL teacher in his or her classroom in a Southern African context, to explore the reasons underlying the use of different question types and to analyse the way in which the teacher asked questions to scaffold learning. In order to understand how I carried out the research, ethnography, its underlying principles and the rationale for adopting it, will be discussed.

3.3.1 WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

The term ‘ethnography’ is not clearly defined in common usage, and there is some disagreement about what it is (Spindler 1982). Furthermore, “the meaning of the term overlaps with that of several others such as ‘qualitative method,’ ‘interpretive research,’ ‘case study,’ ‘participant observation,’ ‘life history method,’ ‘discourse analysis,’ etc” (Graddol et al 1994: 1). Other researchers hold the same view that defining ethnography is difficult because the term “is often used in conjunction with other terms such as participant observation, qualitative methodology, case study, and to a certain extent, action research” (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995: 119) or “field research, or anthropological research” (Goetz and LeCompte 1984: 2). Another problem associated with the definition of the term is that “none of these is used in a precisely defined way either” (Graddol et al 1994: 1).

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 119) suggest that instead of trying to define ethnography, researchers can focus on the kinds of features which are characteristic of ethnography rather than trying to define it. They provide a summary of the characteristics as follows:

- * the production of descriptive cultural knowledge.
- * the description of activities in relation to a particular cultural context from the view point of the members of the group themselves.
- * the production of a list of features that constitute membership of a group or a culture.

From the summary, all the statements agree that ethnography involves the study of culture or characteristics of a group in real life situations (Nunan 1992). However, another problem is that the definition of ethnography rests upon assumptions about the concept of culture and the concept of culture is difficult to define (Wolcott 1975, cited in Spindler 1982). I will adopt Goodenough's (1976: 5) definition:

The culture of any society is made up of the concepts, beliefs, and principles of action and organization that an ethnographer has found could be attributed successfully to the members of that society in context of his dealings with them.

For an ethnographer, cultural context is crucial and may be defined by some as the school or classroom culture while by others, cultural context may extend into the home, community and wider society (Johnson 1992). Thus, ethnography is unique in its holistic study of cultural phenomena and cultural interpretation of behaviour.

3.3.2 CHARACTERIZING PRINCIPLES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

The use of ethnographic techniques for gathering and analysing language data has become an alternative to formal experiments which have failed to produce the definite answers that some

researchers expect (Ellis 1990, cited in Nunan 1992). According to Ellis, the relationship between instruction and learning is obscure and is not linear as experimental researchers claim. Moreover, classrooms do not exist simply to provide cannon-fodder for research, and the relationship between findings from a formal experiment, conducted under laboratory conditions, and classroom practice is complex and indirect.

Ethnography rests on two key assumptions (Wilson 1982, cited in Nunan 1992). The first one is the principle of naturalism which holds that human behaviour should be studied in the naturalistic, uncontrolled situations which have significant influence on that behaviour, rather than in laboratory settings. The second one, according to Wilson, questions the belief that reality is objective and independent of the subjective perceptions of researchers and their subjects. Ethnographers believe that human behaviour cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perceptions of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects (Nunan 1992). Thus, ethnographers question the traditional stance of the researcher and attempt to interpret behaviours from the perspectives of the participants' different understandings rather than from the observer, or analyst's supposedly objective analysis (Chaudron 1988).

While the psychometricians identify, describe and explain external, objective reality, the ethnographer is required to develop rapport, trust and empathy with the subjects of research in order to understand behaviour in real situations and settings where people actually live and work rather than in laboratory settings (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995).

According to Van Lier (1988), a central characteristic of ethnography is cultural description. Van Lier presents two views of ethnography, the weak and strong views. He argues that the weak

view is currently prevalent in Second Language (L2) research and it consists of unstructured and unsystematic observation. In the weak view, ethnography is seen to generate questions and hypotheses which will then be tested by means of formal experiments. On the other hand, the strong view, to which Van Lier (1988:154) subscribes, “is theory-building, and thus the core of a naturalistic approach to social science.” According to this view, questions and hypotheses often emerge during the course of the investigation, rather than beforehand. The data-first approach is valuable in developing ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967), that is, theory which stems from data rather than from logic alone. Whether one subscribes to a strong or weak interpretation of ethnography will depend on one’s views of the status of knowledge, the nature of truth and what one accepts as legitimate evidence (Nunan 1992). My research falls within the strong view in that questions and hypotheses will emerge during the course of the study. It is also naturalistic, although it does make use of some predetermined categories of analysis, and it takes into account the subjective perspectives of those involved in research, both as the researcher and researched.

Ethnography is guided by two central principles, the ‘emic’ and the ‘holistic’ principles. Emic refers to a view from within that notices just those features of the scene that are marked as significant by internal criteria while holistic refers to ‘thick description’ of phenomena. Both these principles require constant attention to the context of actions and to the viewpoints of participants themselves, as a group or as individuals (Van Lier 1988). Thus, ethnography is based on the principle of ‘thick’ contextual descriptions of social subjects as they actively and creatively make sense of their social worlds (Geertz 1973, cited in Johnson 1992), in order to build a holistic picture. As Woods (cited in Eisner and Peshkin 1990: 44) put it:

Ethnography by definition is descriptive. In anthropology it means literally, “a picture of the way of life of some interacting group....” Faithfulness to a culture as it is found, is one of the guiding principles of ethnography, and immersion in the culture under the study is

the general strategy towards the end.

However, the ethnographer needs to go beyond description to explanation and analysis of data (Nunan 1992). The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at the most (Graddol et al 1994).

Ethnography tends to be defined by its use of participant and non-participant observation (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). The former involves the researcher taking part in the activities under study while the latter sets the researcher outside the classroom events being observed. In the context of language acquisition, both participant and non-participant observation provide us with a detailed and comprehensive description of subjects' SLA behavior and deal with a single subject's development (or only a few subjects' development) over time (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991).

However, the limitation of both these research methodologies involves 'the observer paradox' (Labov 1972, cited in Van Lier 1988), that is, the mere presence of any observer and the technical devices used may alter the behaviour of the research participants. This problem can be minimized if the researcher makes repeated visits to the classroom, familiarizes his or her subjects with any intrusive data collection devices (tape recorders, video tape recorders), and maintains openness to the people involved in the study (Allwright and Bailey 1991).

On the other hand, the presence of the researcher may lighten the behaviours in question. As Carspecken (1996: 52) puts it: "The effects of those researched can even clarify what one is after:

the construction of cultural forms.”

Observation is not the only technique used in ethnographic research; ethnography is defined by the use of a variety of data collection techniques namely: field notes, interviewing, written resources (archives and other contemporary documents) and any form of technical device (cameras, audio tapes, video tapes) that will enable the ethnographer to collect more live data that is immediate, natural and detailed (Spinder 1982). Data collection is generally longitudinal.

3.4 RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Although ethnography has gained considerable support as “potentially the most useful means to study classroom phenomena” (Van Lier 1988: 5), it has not lacked criticisms. In view of the statement, I will examine what these criticisms are and discuss how ethnography addresses these limitations.

Validity and reliability in ethnographic research “have often been questioned on the grounds that they are unsystematic and unscientific, at least if judged from the traditional perspective and classical experimental model” (Trueba 1982: 12). According to proponents of quantitative research, the research process and product should be able to meet the criteria of validity and reliability (Allwright and Bailey 1991).

Validity refers to the extent a piece of research actually investigates what it claims to investigate (Nunan 1992). Validity, as a technical construct in experimental studies, takes two important forms, internal validity and external validity (Allwright and Bailey 1991). The former relates to the extent to which an experimental study can be reliably and unambiguously related to any

treatment which was implemented. However, one may argue that the major concern of ethnography is not to establish a causal relationship between variables (Nunan 1992).

In order to meet the internal validity criterion, the classroom ethnographer focuses on social contexts, so as to understand what happens in actual classrooms with real people, rather than tightly controlled experiments. In fact, “we still know very little about what happens in classrooms between teachers and pupils, and have little basic information about teacher-pupil dialogue in different teaching situations” (Edwards and Westgate 1994: 3). As Anderson (1990: 155) puts it, “the existence of a natural setting enhances validity over that which might be found in some contrived experiment.” Therefore, ethnographic study is concerned with what actually happens in real classrooms, and it is this which provides internal validity. Moreover, “ethnographic classroom research directly illustrates classroom methodology, and is therefore of immediate relevance to classroom teachers” (Van Lier 1988: xvi). Reports of classroom research will give teachers insights into what happens in classrooms and will enable teachers and researchers alike to better understand the teaching and learning processes, thereby facilitating these processes in all their complexities.

As mentioned earlier, another form of validity relates to external validity, that is, the extent to which the findings from a study carried out in a particular site can be generalized to other sites (Nunan 1992). However, generalizability in ethnographic research cannot be a major goal because the first concern must be to analyse the data as they are, rather than to compare them to other data to see how similar they are (Van Lier 1988). As Van Lier observed, early generalizing often prevents depth of analysis. Moreover, the concerns of a teacher in one school may not necessarily be similar to another (Anderson 1990) and therefore “the unique and particular are not

generalizable” (Van Lier 1988: 2).

However, ethnographic research seeks to meet the external validity criterion in its own way. One line of argument is to exploit qualities and strengths associated with case studies (Edwards and Westgate 1994). Since ethnographic inquiry by its nature focuses on single cases or at most on a limited setting of action, “ethnographers feel that an in-depth study that gives accurate knowledge of one setting not markedly dissimilar from other relevant settings is likely to be generalizable in substantial degree to these other settings”. Moreover, ethnographers feel that ‘it is better to have in-depth, accurate knowledge of one setting than superficial and possibly skewed or misleading information about isolated relationships in many settings” (Spindler: 1982: p.8). Furthermore, as Edwards and Westgate (1994: 80) observed:

in-depth studies of particular settings carry more intuitive conviction, enable more penetrating questions to be asked about them, can develop observational and analytic methods which can be applied (with suitable modifications) to other cases, and are valuable in generating hypotheses for others to follow up.

Another answer to questions about generalizability is that correlational and experimental research designs are also subject to severe strictures which may distort the context of investigation. And if these designs fail to take into account context and meaning, their results may be significantly less generalizable than a good ethnographic study (Spindler 1982).

As stated earlier, another criticism levelled against ethnographic inquiry is reliability; that is, the extent to which research procedures become consistent when used over time and across a variety of people (Allwright and Bailey 1991). Critics of the ethnographic approach argue that it is difficult for outsiders either to analyse the data themselves (and thereby establish the internal reliability) or to replicate the study (thereby establishing its external reliability) (Nunan 1992).

However, to address the problem of reliability, the classroom ethnographer tends to be explicit about the social position s/he holds within the group being investigated, the choice of informants, the social situations and conditions, the analytic constructs and premises, and the methods of data collection and analysis (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). These researchers warn us that even if an exactly parallel context could be found, the second researcher is unlikely to hold exactly the same status in the second social position. Moreover, “the researcher is the only observer there, so the reliability of the results depends as much as anything on the reliability of the observer, the primary data collection instrument” (Anderson 1990: 154).

Thus, the ethnographer needs to be explicit about the definitions of constructs and premises because replication requires explicit identification of the assumptions and meta-theories that underly choice terminology and methods of analysis (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). Ethnographers need to present their methods so explicitly that their report can be used as a guide by those wishing to replicate the research (Nunan 1992). Furthermore, the ethnographer uses a variety of different kinds of data to increase the reliability and validity of the study (Spindler 1982).

Therefore, an ethnographic approach to classroom research and language teaching and learning is useful to practitioners and researchers who are interested in understanding what happens in classrooms. As teachers and researchers, we need to understand what concerns us.

3.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

3.5.1 RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH SITE

I selected my place of work as the setting for my research for several reasons. First, I had worked in that school for several years and, as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 124) have observed, “some

difficulties fade away when the teacher is conducting field work in her own setting.” I knew the school, its organization and the students and would have considerable advantages with regard to access, entry and establishment of role. I wanted to use that knowledge, but at the same time set aside my preconceptions and stereotypes in order to understand what happens in ESL classrooms, in this specific context. Most importantly, I understood the interpersonal relationships (allegiances, line of disagreements and friendships) of the staff and students and this helped me to adopt the ethical stance (confidentiality and privacy) crucial in ethnographic studies. However, I was aware of the fact that familiarity with the place might influence me in the way I carried out the research and might lead me to take some of the things at school for granted.

3.5.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

I selected the research participants for two reasons. First, I was involved in small-scale research, and needed a teacher who would be willing to be observed within a short period of my study at the research site. After I had attended an English departmental meeting at the school where I introduced myself to the members of the department, an ESL teacher volunteered to be observed. I therefore chose a Form C class which was taught by the teacher who was willing to be interviewed as I felt it would be convenient for both the teacher and researcher. I also took into account the responses of students in order to triangulate because, from the ethnographer’s point of view, “the gathering of many kinds of techniques has been seen to increase the validity and reliability of the study” (Spindler 1982: 460). Four students (two male and two female) were chosen in terms of their participation (two active and two passive) during observation, for the interviews.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are certain issues to be considered by researchers with regard to safeguarding subject's rights in the study. One such issue is trustworthiness. Ely et al (1991: 93-94) write:

Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means that at least the processes of research are being carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people being studied. The entire endeavour must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analysed, how one's assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated. Trustworthiness is, thus, more than a set of procedures.

In this research report, I tried to keep to the principles of research by establishing trust in the research participants. I informed the headmaster, the teacher and students about my intention to conduct research in an ESL classroom. Although I did not tell the teacher and students that I was interested in "a teacher's questions," this became clear during the stimulated-recall interviews. Both the teacher and students had access to the lesson transcripts I had made and were informed about the stages of my developments. I also validated the information I had by calling both the teacher and students for stimulated-recall interviews to reflect on what happened in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher had access to the analyses of the lesson transcripts I had made and was allowed to respond to them.

3.7 PROCEDURE

3.7.1 GAINING ENTRY

One of the major preoccupations of ethnography is how to enter the field setting (Anderson 1990). The ethnographer needs to gain access, not only gaining physical access but also building trust and developing a relationship there, which is crucial in qualitative research (Walford 1991). The ethnographer needs the permission of those who are in control, the respect and trust of those in the setting and to establish a working relationship to enable him or her to observe and

participate without necessarily altering the situation (Anderson 1990).

First, I phoned the school principal to find out if he would be interested in my doing research at the school and later wrote a formal letter to explain my intentions because Bell (cited in Cohen and Manion 1994: 354) remarks:

Permission to carry out an investigation must always be sought at an early stage. As soon as you have an agreed project outline and have read enough to convince yourself that the topic is feasible, it is advisable to make a formal written approach to the individuals and organisation concerned, outlining your plans. Be honest. If you are carrying out the investigation in connection with a diploma or degree course, say that is what you are doing. If you feel your study will probably yield useful and/or interesting information, make a particular point of that fact - but be careful not to claim more than the investigation merits.

I also met the principal and briefed him of my intentions on an informal basis. Then when the school reopened in July, I met the principal who introduced me to the staff members and the English teachers at the school (although some of them already knew me). I also attended an English department meeting where I briefed the ESL teachers about the nature and scope of the research. I did not tell them that the focus of my research was a teacher's questions because Anderson (1990: 151) warns ethnographic researchers against, "becoming too specific, however, or awareness of the exact focus of your research could change people's behaviour in the setting." Being too specific could have changed the real essence of ethnography (studying behaviour in its natural setting). Instead, I told them that I was interested in classroom interaction. Having gained entry, I decided how to carry out the research.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

In ethnographic studies, researchers seldom rely on only one means of gathering information (Johnson 1992). Researchers use a variety of field work techniques to collect different kinds of

data in different ways to ensure that different perspectives inform the interpretation. This is referred to as triangulation. Triangulation refers to “the inspection of different kinds of data, different methods and a variety of research tools” (Van Lier 1988: 13). I triangulated by using a variety of techniques common in ethnographic research namely: observation, audio recording, transcript analysis, field notes and stimulated recall interviews. Triangulation is valuable in that it reduces observer or interview bias and enhances the validity and reliability of the information (Johnson 1992).

3.8.1 OBSERVATION

I used observation as the primary classroom procedure to record the way a teacher asked questions in ESL classrooms. Observation is defined as “a procedure of keeping record of classroom events in such a way that it can later be studied” (Allwright 1988, cited in Ellis 1990: 65). It “involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching” (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 12).

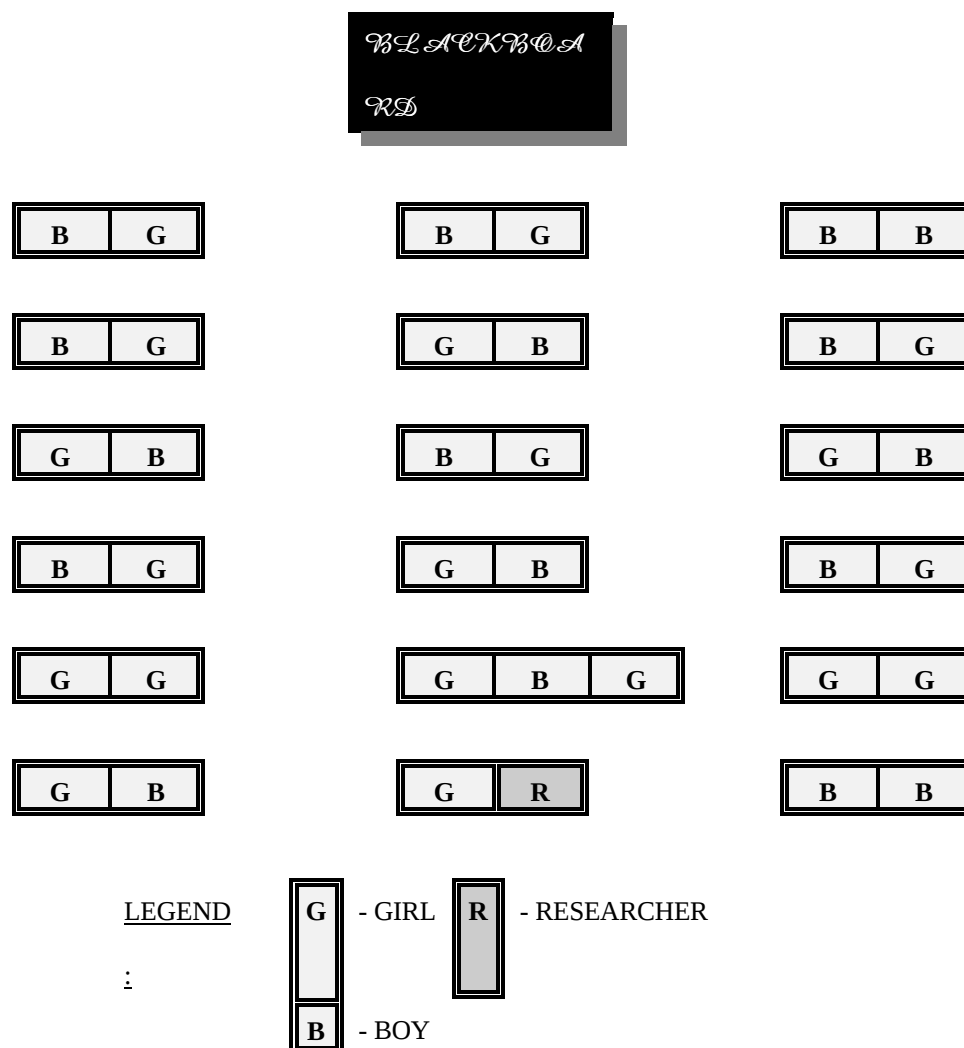
I used observation for various reasons. Firstly, observation as a data collection procedure has gained prominence with recent emphasis on classroom process research and researchers use it to study language learning and teaching processes in the classroom and to study teachers’ and learners’ behaviours (Seliger and Shohamy 1989). Secondly, observation is used for examining a phenomenon while it is still going on. Since I wanted to understand the way a teacher asked questions in ESL classrooms, I observed a class to “study a phenomenon at close range with many of the classroom variables, a feature which is very important in studying language behaviours” (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 162).

In order to prepare myself for the research to be undertaken, I conducted a pilot study in an ESL classroom, in a high school in Grahamstown. The purpose of the pilot study was to enable myself to become familiar with certain research techniques (classroom observation, audio tape recording, transcribing, interviewing, analysing) in order to make informed decisions about the procedure for the subsequent, larger research project.

Two months after the pilot study, a week of English lessons in Lesotho was observed using a non-participatory method. I visited the school for a period of a week so as to negotiate with the teacher how to go about the process and also to enable students to get used to the researcher's presence in their classroom. Moreover, I intended to practise observing in the classroom.

Since I had adopted a non-participatory role, I positioned myself at the back of the class from where I observed and took field notes, and audio-taped a week of English lessons. The first thing that I observed was the structure of the classroom. Thirty-six students (17 boys and 18 girls) were arranged in pairs in different rows in which a boy and a girl shared a desk; however, a few students had chosen to change this arrangement. I had to share a desk with a girl seated at the back of the class in the second row because there were no spare desks (see Table 1 below).

TABLE 1 Classroom arrangement in Form C1



At first, the girl next to me seemed to be very uncomfortable but after the teacher had introduced me to the students, they ignored me. He then asked them if I could use the tape recorder and they showed no objection to that.

I observed five English lessons where different text types (novel, grammar and poetry) were taught. In the first lesson on the novel, individual students read aloud in turn, pausing after a few paragraphs and waiting for their teacher to explain what they had read. In the second lesson on

the novel, the teacher highlighted important points from the previous lesson and asked questions about Seraki. In the third lesson, the teacher asked students to find sentences from the novel, and asked them to write those sentences on the board. In the fourth lesson on grammar, the teacher asked students to identify prepositions from the sentences they had written the previous day. During a poetry lesson, one student read the poem, the teacher asked them questions relating to the poet's background and the poem as a whole. He said he taught that way because he wanted to catch up with other teachers who shared the stream with him because he was behind.

Although I observed and audio-taped lessons, as scheduled in the third week of July, I only transcribed the lessons in the fourth week of July because in the third week, the students were reading the novel to catch up and the teacher did not ask any questions except 'comprehension checks' (*Do you understand? Are there any questions?*). Apart from observation I relied on extensive field notes.

3.8.2 FIELD NOTES

Ethnographic studies rely heavily on field notes to "provide descriptions and interpretations of individuals and events" (Jackson 1995: 135). Field notes may be regarded as the raw data from which the researcher fashions and moulds the ethnography (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). I used field notes as a way of recording observation in this study. Keeping field notes provided me with references essential for the analysis of the data. These notes were used to supplement the information that was recorded. When taking and making notes, I had no particular focus except that I concentrated on the questions the teacher asked and how he responded to them, students' responses and questions which emerged from them. I also allocated numbers to students in their different rows so as to identify students who were active and those who were passive.

3.8.3 AUDIO RECORDING

In ethnographic studies, an ethnographer may choose to use any form of technical device (cameras, audio-tapes and video-tapes) to collect live data which is immediate, natural and detailed (Spindler 1982). I used a tape-recorder to record lessons and interviews. An advantage of recording a lesson is that “the recording can be replayed and examined many times and capture many details of the lessons that cannot be easily observed by other means, such as actual language used by teachers or learners during the lesson” (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 11). This is very important in research designed to analyse language use.

However, recording a lesson has limitations in that the presence of the recording device may make teachers and/or learners feel uncomfortable and may alter the normal behaviour of both the teacher and students (Johnson 1992). Although the presence of a recording device cannot be eliminated totally (Allwright and Bailey 1991), I tried to reduce its effects. I brought the tape into class early on so that the students would get used to the device and carry on as normal. The ethical issues related to audio recording were also considered. I sought permission from the teacher to audio tape the lesson and the teacher explained the use of the recording device to the students who did not give me problems. Then, after audio recording, I transcribed the lessons.

3.8.4 TRANSCRIPTS AND ANALYSIS

I used both the lesson transcripts and transcripts of follow up interviews with the teacher and students to reflect on the questions that were asked during classroom interaction. The transcripts formed a basis for analysis of data and were used to supplement other data collection procedures

discussed earlier in this study. Transcribing lessons proved difficult because of the country's instability (see 1.4). My original plan had been to transcribe lessons immediately after they had been observed, but due to the political instability, that was not always possible because I ran short of batteries at times, since shops were closed. After lesson transcripts were completed; these were then used to stimulate recall in separate interviews with the teacher and students. I finally analysed them using three levels of analysis: cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogic levels. The cognitive level was based on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive domain (Bloom 1956) which categorized questions on a cognitive scale while the linguistic level focused on the functions of questions as used by Long and Sato (1983). The pedagogic level, focused on the way questions are used to 'mediate' and 'scaffold' learning (Vygotsky 1978 and Bruner 1986).

I called both the teacher and students for the interview a week after I had analysed the lesson transcripts. However, the purposes of the interviews were different. In the teacher's interviews, the teacher was requested to go through the lesson transcripts and provide the rationale for asking the questions in the transcript and to comment on the analysis of the lesson transcripts I had made. On the other hand, I asked students to reflect on the lesson transcripts and comment on the questions asked. It is worth noting though, that I did not ask students to comment on the transcript analyses as I felt that question taxonomies were beyond the students' discourse, especially at Form C level.

3.8.5 INTERVIEWS

I used interviews as a method of collecting data to obtain different perceptions of a teacher's questions. I used interviews for various reasons. First, interviewing is considered "a powerful

way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education” (Seidman 1991: 7). The goals of the interview are “to obtain ‘emic’ knowledge since the informant (any person being interviewed) is one who knows and who has the emic, native cultural knowledge” (Johnson 1992: 145). I wanted to use this knowledge to better understand what was going on in the classroom. Secondly, the best way to obtain information is by actually talking to the subjects (Seliger and Shohamy 1989). By using interviews, I wanted to incorporate into the research the subjective perceptions and belief systems of those involved in the research, both as the researcher and subjects. Lastly, I wanted to validate the data that were collected during observation and field notes.

However, Nunan (1992) warns researchers of bias inherent in interviews. One source of bias which Nunan identifies is the asymmetrical relationship between the participants. He argues that participants do not have the same rights even in an unstructured relationship. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) argue that interviews can be difficult to administer. I found it difficult to conduct interviews with the students and their responses were very short.

Since I did not want to exercise control over the research participants, I adopted an unstructured interview to interview both the teacher and students. As observed by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), there are numerous advantages of the unstructured interview. The unstructured interview allows the interviewer greater scope in asking questions out of sequence and interviewees of answering questions in their own way. Moreover, such an interview can provide for a greater and freer flow of information between the researcher and the subjects. It is believed that the more freedom interviewees obtain, the more information is likely to emerge (Seliger and Shohamy 1989). Furthermore, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) observed that the unstructured interview can

offer the researcher greater flexibility in that such interviews often merge into a conversation. Conversations as we know, constitute an important source of data in ethnographic field research.

After I had completed the transcripts, I conducted stimulated-recall interviews to enable the teacher, the students and the researcher to present their various interpretations of what was going on in the classroom and to link the interpretations to the points in the lesson which gave rise to them. The basic idea underlying the method of stimulated recall “is that a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if presented with a large number of cues or stimuli which occurred during the original stimuli” (Bloom 1953, cited in Powney and Watts 1987: 28). Stimulated-recall is “a technique in which the researcher records and transcribes part of the lesson and gets either the teacher (or where possible, the students) to comment on what was happening at the time that teaching and learning took place” (Nunan 1992: 95). Stimulated recall is valuable in that it can yield insights into processes on learning and teaching which would be difficult to obtain by other means. It also enables the voice of the teacher to be heard. When it is used with other techniques, the results can be both reliable and valid.

My original plan was to have three interviews on questions asked in three different types of lesson target (novel, grammar, poetry) and to interview both the teacher and students after each lesson that was taught. I had also planned to space each interview from two days to a week apart. As Seidman (1991: 14) states, “spacing allows time for the participants to mull over the preceding interview but not enough time to lose their connection between the two.” But due to the country’s instability, I had to change my schedule. Instead of three interviews, I had two for the teacher and one for the students. While the teacher was given three different lesson transcripts to comment on, the students were given two (based on novel and poetry teaching). This option was time-

consuming and tedious but I had to resort to it because of time pressure. All the interviews were conducted in English a week after the lessons were observed and transcribed.

The interviews took place in the deputy headmaster's office because the classrooms were noisy or were used by other students at the school. Student interviews were all conducted on Saturday, during study time as there was no other time because the school had a very tight schedule due to the political situation. First, the interviewees were called together, briefed about the nature and scope of the research and asked permission to record the interviews. As observed by Walford (1991:65)

access in the form of trust only develops slowly in research, as it does in any relationship. Qualitative research asks researchers to document and monitor their own impact on the situation they are researching, as a strategy for elucidation and validation of data.

One of the crucial issues that the pupils had to be sure of before they could develop a relationship of trust was to be told why I was doing the research and why I needed to interview them. Although they had been told this earlier, I reinforced this before the interviews and assured them that I would not, under any circumstances, tell their teachers or anyone about what they said. I also assured them that what I observed and the interviews I was going to have with them were not going to affect their marks in the final examinations. I also encouraged them to feel free to ask any questions and if necessary, to ask for clarifications during the interview sessions. Soon, the students were open with me and told me why they felt they were either active or passive during the teaching-learning process.

Each interview lasted between twenty and twenty five minutes because students' responses were very short and precise. On the other hand, I interviewed the teacher on two occasions; the first

interview lasted for thirty minutes while the second lasted for thirty five minutes. After I had collected data, I analysed them to present my findings and to engage in the writing up of the research.

3.9 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Analysis refers to an attempt to organize, account for and provide explanations in order to make sense of the kinds of data collected. This involves “sifting, organizing, summarizing and synthesizing the data so as to arrive at the results and conclusions of research” (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 201). The selection of data analysis will depend upon the focus of research, the design chosen to investigate it and the type of data collected (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995).

In ethnographic research, data analysis is mainly qualitative and the researcher may have a “heuristic” (Seliger and Shohamy: 29) objective in that s/he may gather data in order to describe what happens and generate hypotheses about the phenomena studied. Analysis in ethnographic research is an on-going process which takes place at every step of the research process. In ethnographic field work, the processes of initial analysis, classification and organization take place in the field where the researcher develops analytic questions, plans further data collection out of leads and questions in the previous notes (Anderson 1990; Johnson 1992; Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). The researcher analyzes the data by looking for commonalities, regularities or cultural patterns across the various data texts in order to develop particular themes, topics, or substantial areas for further analysis. Analysis “requires developing categories and concepts that make sense and have particular relevance to the participants in the setting” (Johnson 1992: 148). Finally, these categories and concepts, developed inductively in order to discover patterns and relationships among them, can lead to the development of “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss

1967). I already had some categories for the analysis, but I tried to use these flexibly and the analysis of the use of scaffolding was sensitive to the data.

The presentation of data attempts to describe the social situation from the inside, to make what is familiar strange and strange familiar and to provide complete descriptions of it for the purpose of scientific understanding (Johnson 1992). Once the description is made, then the higher levels of analysis aimed at achieving explanations are presented and conclusions are drawn.

This section above describes analysis in the general context of ethnographic research. For this research, I used three levels of analysis namely: Long and Sato's, Bloom's and scaffolding (see 3.8). Based on the results of the pilot study I conducted (see Murray and Nhlapo, 1998), for the first two levels of analysis, a predetermined system was used to analyse the transcripts. First the teacher's questions were categorized and classified according to the linguistic and cognitive scale (see Appendices B1-5). After that the data, based on the transcripts, the stimulated recall interviews with both the teacher and the students and the researcher's interpretation, were analysed by the researcher.

For the third analysis, scaffolding, the analysis was not based on the predetermined framework, but was developed by the researcher using mainly the ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986).

3.10 THE PRODUCT OF ETHNOGRAPHY

It is in the writing up rather than in the field work that the materials become ethnographic. Thus, the product of a full ethnographic study is ethnography, often a book (Johnson 1992). The researcher may present parts of a study or its key findings in journal articles or in book chapters. Preparing a written report allows the researcher at least as much time for analysing and writing as spent in the field.

The ethnographer produces a written report at the end of the inquiry process, including gathering and analysis of data (Wolcott 1975, cited in Spindler 1982). The report is written in a descriptive style, which provides readers with sufficient descriptive and interpretative information of how ethnographers reached “independent interpretations of their own” (Wolcott 1988, cited in Johnson 1992: 150). During the presentation of data, “extensive quotes and lengthy descriptions of the settings and interactions are always included to present as fully as possible, a picture of the setting and to produce validating evidence of ethnographers’ interpretation of data” (Spindler 1982: 462).

Although the presentation of data in ethnographic research may adopt “a more detached, scientific view of the situation” (Anderson 1990: 154), this is not always the case because this approach is associated with the quantitative and objective view of research. Instead, the qualitative, ethnographic researcher “focuses on the perspective of the insider, talking to and/or observing subjects who have experienced the activities or procedures under scrutiny” (Leedy 1993: 144). The qualitative researcher believes that first hand experience provides the most meaningful data and that the report is written by the author presented in the first person singular (I).

In brief, ethnography, is a research strategy which focuses on natural settings, defined by the use of participatory and non-participatory observation as well as a descriptive, contextual, open-ended

and in-depth approach to doing research (Spindler 1982). As a research tool, it involves the adoption of a grounded approach to data and is theory-generating. It also involves thick description of phenomena under investigation. Ethnographers need to go beyond description to explanation and detailed analysis. Both the explanation and analysis are thick and holistic and the ethnographer achieves this by using a variety of instruments and data collection tools to describe the social setting in a broader socio-cultural context.

CHAPTER 4

4. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the analysis of data collected in the study. Each type of lesson (novel, grammar, poetry) is analysed in turn. Then, an attempt is made to draw together threads of the findings from the analysis of individual lessons to make some general observations about the teacher's questions in the lessons as a whole.

It should be remembered that the data collection process followed this sequence: observation; transcription; interview with the teacher using stimulated recall; analysis; separate interviews with the teacher and students. However, in the analysis and discussion of data, this sequence has not been followed, rather an integrated approach has been adopted. I quote from transcripts, field notes and the teacher's and students' interviews in order to test and support the findings that emerge in the formal analysis of the three lesson types. By bringing together data from different sources, I interpret and reinterpret the teacher's questions from different perspectives (Bailey and Nunan 1996).

4.2 LESSON 1, 2, and 3 - NOVEL

4.2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before I discuss how I analysed the lessons, I will provide a brief summary of the novel that was the topic of the first three lessons transcribed, together with some relevant contextual background information.

4.2.1.1 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The title of Michael Williams' novel, Crocodile Burning, has a symbolic meaning. The crocodile

represents the old traditions that enslaved people in South Africa: the education system (Bantu education), the government and its policies, detention without trial, the State of Emergency, and the crime and the violence in the townships.

The main character in the novel, Seraki Mandidi, lives among “crocodiles” in Soweto: his neighbourhood is terrorized by a gang known as the Naughty Boys, people are beaten up, houses are burnt and his brother, Phakane, has been thrown into jail unjustly.

In an attempt to help his brother, Seraki pays King Danny, the leader of the Naughty Boys, to find him. Without his parents’ knowledge, Seraki is accompanied by King Danny and he visits his brother in prison. Phakane tells Seraki of the hunger strike on which all the prisoners are to embark and Seraki realizes a sudden change in his brother’s face as he talks about it - he looks like an adult.

However, after a few minutes of his visit to the prison, Phakane is signalled by Half-face, the prison guard, that he has to part with his brother. Seraki then goes to the musical theatre he has recently joined. Unfortunately, he is late for the rehearsal and hopes that Mosake, the director of the musical, will understand because both Seraki and Mosaki are trying to fight and kill the “crocodile.” Going on tour to New York with his successful theatrical group, Mosake thinks that he has escaped the “crocodiles” that haunted him in South Africa.

4.2.1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE LESSONS

It should be remembered that the novel was taught on three successive days: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. On the first day, which was a double period, individual students read aloud in turn, pausing after a few paragraphs and waiting for the teacher to explain what they had read. As he

explained the paragraphs, he asked questions about the novel. The teacher asked a total of 81 questions in this lesson.

The second day was a continuation of the first one but different in that it was a single period and there was no reading aloud. The teacher reviewed and highlighted some important points that had emerged the previous day. He asked 19 questions in this lesson.

The third day was also a single period, the teacher asked students to look at their books and find any sentence they liked. They then wrote these sentences on the board and read them aloud. The purpose of this activity was not revealed at that time. It only became clear on Thursday, the following day, that the teacher wanted to use these sentences as the basis for a grammar lesson that day. He asked only 5 questions in the lesson on Wednesday.

4.2.2 LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

As indicated in the methodology section (see 3.8), three levels of analysis namely: Long and Sato's, Bloom's and the ideas of Vygotsky and Bruner about scaffolding, were used to analyse data. For the first two levels of analysis, a predetermined system was used to analyse the transcripts and the full analysis is provided in Appendices B1-5 together with summaries for ease of reference.

During the analysis of transcripts, an attempt will be made to highlight what the teacher said about the questions he asked, how he responded to the researcher's analysis of the lesson transcripts, and what the learners said about their participation in class and questions which their teacher asked.

It will be seen from the summary in Appendix C that the overall number of questions asked by the

teacher in the three lessons was 105. Students asked only two which were redirected by the teacher to the class as a whole. Thus, Ellis (1993) is right that teachers ask many questions in ESL classrooms.

With regard to the communicative functions of questions, it will be seen that there were more referential than display questions in the three lessons on the novel. In fact, the total number of referential questions in the three lessons was 46 while it was 33 for display. This contrasts with the findings of Long and Sato that teachers asked more display than referential questions (79% as opposed to 21%). What may have accounted for the number of referential questions in these lessons is the fact that most of them required a personal response, as in ‘How many of you have been arrested?’ ‘Stealing what?’ and so on. It is worth noting too that most of the referential questions occurred in lesson 1. In lesson 2, there were more display than referential questions.

It can also be observed that there were no clarification requests. This is surprising because there were several points in the transcript where the students’ utterances were unclear and needed clarification.

The following is an example:

- T: ...Now, Phakane changes, he becomes another Phakane, a Phakane Seraki never knew, he frowns and there is a sparkle in the blackness of his eyes and some lights on his forehead and we are told that he looks like an adult. Who can look like an adult? How do adults look like? Are they different from us?
- SS: Yes, sir.
- T: How are they different from us? By looking at their faces, Seraki looks at the facial appearance of Phakane. How does an adult look differently from a child? You mean if you see two faces, you must conclude this one belongs to an adult and the other one to a child?
- SS: Yes, sir.
- T: How? [Calls a student by name.] Can you differentiate them?
- S14: The child does not have a beard. The child’s face is ‘new’ while an adult is old. [The teacher laughs at the expression and the class joins in.]
- S34: An adult has **two meats**. [The student is moulding his cheeks to create wrinkles.]
- T: **Two meats?**

S34: Yes, sir.
 T: By looking at this [points at his face], you can see those **two meats**?
 SS: Yes, sir.
 T: Do we have **two meats**? [Students laugh.] You mean your parents have **two meats**? How is an adult different from a child?
 S: A child has a new face while an adult has a rough face [Students laugh.]
 T: Ah, the moment I see someone with a rough face, I must conclude that he is an adult?
 S15: He looks like an adult.
 T: So, adults have rough faces.
 S15: Yes, sir.
 T: Anyway, Phakane was like that. If an adult has **two meats**, or two faces or an ugly face, if that is the case, Phakane was like that because he was a different Phakane. So you know that, in that way, Phakane was different from the way Seraki knew him.

(1/5: 03-08-1998)

Referring to the interaction above and comments by the teacher after the lesson, it is clear that he did not understand the students' responses in bold print above yet he did not ask for clarification. Instead, he asked a series of 'confirmation checks,' which did not prompt the learner to clarify what he had said. After the lesson, the teacher remarked to me that the student had given him funny responses, yet he used the phrase 'two meats' in his summing up of the students' response to his questions.

Instead of seeking clarification, the teacher seems to turn the students' expressions into a joke. The use of humour is a feature of the teacher's style of teaching. This will be dealt with in more detail when the scaffolding of the lesson is discussed.

Although the students enjoyed the humour, some of them were still confused as to what 'two meats' meant. In my interview with one of the students, she said:

The question which said, how can you differentiate adults from children? And the answer was, adults have two meats. I did not understand what they meant by two meats....I still do not understand it now.

(L: 22-08-1998)

Confirmation checks seem to be preferred to clarification requests; there are 8 in lesson 1 and 1 in lesson 3. This contrasts with the findings of Long and Sato (1983) and Pica and Long (1986) who found that there were fewer confirmation checks and clarification requests than comprehension checks in ESL classrooms. It is difficult to explain why confirmation checks are preferred to clarification requests. It may be a way of saving face (Chick and Claude 1986); the teacher does not explicitly show that the students have not made sense, but rather offers possible interpretations.

Expressive questions are those that show the attitude of the speaker. There were 5 such questions used to exercise control. For example, 'Are you working alone there?' and 'Who is your neighbour?' There were 2 such questions in lesson 2 and 1 in lesson 3. There was only one rhetorical question in the lessons on the novel, and this occurred in lesson 1.

With regard to the cognitive depth of questions, most were of a low order. There was a fairly consistent pattern over the three lessons. There was a total number of 31 knowledge, 33 comprehension, 2 application and 9 analysis. Most of the analysis questions occurred in lesson 1. There were no synthesis or evaluation questions. In my interview with the teacher, he justified the use of knowledge questions. This is highlighted in his response to the researcher's analysis below:

...There are a few things I want to comment on, especially where the analysis says most of the questions asked were based on recalling. I think there is nothing we can achieve unless we recall. So, my objective was to make them aware and to recall the contents of whatever we were doing. Having finished the book, then can we move forward to some higher level questions and understanding. If we try all the levels at a go, we might not finish the book, questions that might be tested during the final exams might be based on the final pages of the book. So, students might be based on the final pages of the book. So students might not be in a position to answer questions.

(M: 22-08-1998)

The above response draws our attention to other factors which may also affect the type of questions

he asks, such as the intentions of the teacher, the influence of the curriculum and the examination pressure. Elsewhere in the interview the teacher also referred to the amount of work which he had to cover in the literature syllabus, which prevented him from asking higher order questions. Evidently, we cannot ignore contextual factors which influence his teaching and the way he asks questions (Cazden 1988; Van Lier 1988).

Although the teacher is right in saying that learners must understand and recall whatever they have read, it does not necessarily follow that students have to deal with only low order questions.

37 questions were difficult to analyse in terms of Bloom's taxonomy (Cazden 1988). These were expressive questions in Long and Sato's terms, for example, 'Are you working alone there?' and referential which required personal response, for example, 'Does it happen in real life that there are some things in which you are involved and you do not want your parents to know?' Thompson (1997) states teachers should invite learners to talk about themselves rather than only talking about information provided by the textbook. He observed that "one great advantage of this is that it allows the learners to have some degree of control over the input, which may well lead to increased motivation and more investment by learners in the learning process" (Thompson 1997: 101). My field notes indicate that the teacher spent a lot of time asking learners to talk about their personal lives. I found this ironic since he had told me that he was behind and wanted to catch up with the other teachers.

4.2.3 SCAFFOLDING

We should bear in mind that the analysis of scaffolding was not based on a predetermined framework but was developed by the researcher using the previously named authorities. Although there was

evidence of scaffolding, it was not strong. For example, in lesson 1, the teacher did not provide a strong and explicit frame of reference for the lesson. The lesson begins:

- T: Where is Seraki and what did he do? [Instead of answering the question, S15 reads two lines of the novel. Other students burst into laughter.] Anything about Seraki? [No response.] Okay, what I want you to tell us where is Seraki and what did he do. Yes, sir! [He points at a student.]
- S14: He is in prison talking to his brother.
- T: What impression do you get?
- S28: He is a leader.

(1/5: 03-08-1998)

Although questions were asked presumably to set the scene, they were vague, for example, ‘Anything about Seraki?’, ‘What impression do you get?’ Although only one of the four students said they had any difficulty answering the questions in this extract, considered together, the lack of framing and general vagueness, demonstrates that the teacher is not explicit about tasks and learning activities. This is also evident in lesson 2, where he asks students to find sentences without making the purpose clear or referring them to a particular chapter. The students were unclear as to what to do, and my field notes show that one actually asked me for clarification.

Although the teacher tried to conceptualize the novel by drawing on students’ experience, he often did this in a way which seemed to me confusing. For example:

- T: ...Does it happen in real life that there are some things in which you are involved and you do not tell your parents?
- SS: Yes, sir.
- T: For example?
- S1: **Sephiri** church. [Students laugh.]
- T: Sometimes you attend **Sephiri** church like you call it and parents do not know. When do you go to such a church?
- SS: At night.
- T: At night, how come you go at night and your parents do not? [One at a time please!]

S1: We go when we are sure they are asleep.

T: So, when you are sure they are asleep. Are you allowed to take people there?

S34: Only when you **apply** first. [They laugh.]

S1: When you have a **passport**.

(1/5: 22-08-1998)

In my interview with one of the students, she demonstrated her confusion:

...When the teacher said, 'What do you need to go to such a church? And someone said a passport. I did not understand that. I do not know why a passport was mentioned.

(L: 22-08-1998)

The teacher appears to extend the discussion for humorous purposes. This was enjoyed by some students but was confusing to others. For example, in the interview with the student referred to here, she said:

I felt bored when they were talking about things I did not know. I did not know where they appeared. Then I checked my book but there were no passports mentioned. I felt, eh. [She laughs.]

(K: 22-08-1998)

The teacher sometimes uses scaffolding to try to share things he can see in the novel which they cannot. For example, in the following extract, he uses questions to help the students understand how the author provides clues to his readers.

T: Auntie Somoza gives us this information that the Naughty Boys are capable of doing so many things. They have access to the information. They know whose salary is increased, they know whose daughter is ripe for love making, they are capable of buying or bribing police. While Auntie Somoza is telling us that, how come she tells us that? Was she telling us because we are readers? Was she saying I want you to have the information, you C1s, the Naughty Boys are capable of this and that? Was she telling you to store it?

SS: No, sir.

T: How come?

S1: She was talking to Seraki.

T: She was talking to Seraki, so, Auntie Somoza was talking to Seraki and in a way that accidentally had access to this information. From your experience, how come Auntie Somoza

had that information? And the information also helped Seraki to keep waiting for King Danny. There he was patient and he waited.

(1/5: 03-08-1998)

However, he does not pursue this to its conclusion, neither does he provide appropriate feedback. He is therefore unsuccessful in sharing his insights with the students.

The use of follow-up questions to provide clues is seen as a positive aspect of scaffolding (Edwards and Mercer 1987; Nuttall 1996). However, this teacher often uses a series of questions in such a way that the students do not know which one to answer, and the time which he waited for students to answer was short. This is also illustrated in the following extract:

T: Do you think the Naughty Boys were at the shebeen and she was talking to them? [No response.] Any other answer?

S24: Auntie Somoza was talking to the Naughty Boys.

T: Would you have a Naughty Girl? [Students laugh.] Remember he was wearing goggles, none of us now has that but king Danny had. Any answer different from yes? Remember that I said that you could use your own experience. In a shebeen, under normal circumstances people talk. Is that the case?

S24: When people are drunk they talk many things.

(1/5: 03-08-1998)

Despite the weak scaffolding in the lessons, the students thoroughly enjoyed the lessons and appeared to like the teacher. This was due to the conducive learning atmosphere he created through his use of humour, and the way he tapped into students' own experience. Observing the lessons, I felt that the boys enjoyed the teacher's humour more than the girls. However, this was not followed up in the interviews.

4.3 LESSON 4 - GRAMMAR

4.3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is a continuation of lesson 3. Although the teacher's objective was not made clear in the previous lesson, it became clear in this lesson that he wanted to incorporate grammar (prepositions) into literature. Like lessons 2 and 3, this lesson is also a single period.

4.3.2 LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

A summary of the analysis is provided in Appendix C. From this it will be seen that there is a total number of 16 questions asked by the teacher in this lesson. However, none is asked by the students. Unlike the other 3 lessons on novel teaching, there are only display but no referential questions at all in this lesson. Although research indicates that there is considerable variation among teachers (Ellis 1992) concerning the use of display and referential questions, these 4 lessons show that there is variation in one teacher. The teacher asks students to display information about the prepositions which they know. As (it) is revealed in my field notes, it is evident that these students have been taught prepositions before. The following excerpt will illustrate the point:

- T: Could you please read the two sentences which have the words 'to' and 'and?' [They read them.] Could you please read the second one? Why do you think we used 'to?'
- S13: To prepositionalise it.
- T: Which means it is what?
- S13: It is a preposition.

(4/5: 06-08-1998)

This extract also reveals that questions were difficult to classify. For example, "Why do you think we used 'to'?" looks like an open-ended, referential, higher order question. However, from the context, the student's answer and the teacher's response, it is evident that it is a display question.

There are three expressive questions as in ‘Can’t you think of anything rather than ran?’ and ‘Can you imagine the car running on top of the mountain?’ in this lesson. There are two comprehension checks.

The following example shows how difficult it was to distinguish between comprehension checks and expressive questions:

- T: Can you make complete sentences?
S12: I am sitting on top of the world.
S22: He will not pass unless he works very hard.
T: Do you agree with her?
SS: No, sir, yes, sir
T: Why?
S33: It is a preposition.

(4/5: 06-08-1998)

The questions ‘Do you agree with her?’ and ‘Why?’, are intended to test whether students understand a preposition and how they can interpret the use of ‘unless.’ On the other hand, the teacher may be saying, ‘How can you say that “unless” is a preposition?’ and that would qualify those questions as expressive. This shows that Nunan and Lamb (1996) are correct that questions do not serve one function.

It is worth noting here, too, that although the teacher queries whether unless is a preposition, he does not follow through until students understand that it is not. It should be noted that there are no clarification checks, confirmation checks, rhetorical questions or questions which are difficult to categorize.

In terms of the cognitive depth of questions, knowledge questions seem to dominate the lesson. For example:

T: A preposition is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to show direction, manner, place, method, and time. [To a student.] Can you identify a preposition?

S14: Yes, sir.

T: What questions would you ask? [Indicates sentences written on the board.]

S21: Where did Seraki go?

S25: With whom did Seraki go?

T: Look at the following sentences [He reads the sentences from the board]:

- (a) The road ran along the mountain.
- (b) The road ran across the mountain.
- (c) The road ran near the mountain.

T: Do the above sentences differ?

SS: Yes, sir.

S28: It means the road ran inside the mountain and the road ran beside the road.

(4/5: 06-08-1998)

It seems in the excerpt above that the teacher wants students to recall information about the prepositions. However, the questions are difficult to grasp. The use of a 'yes/no' question in the teacher's first utterance is inappropriate and does not achieve his purpose. The next question is broad and elicits one sentence without a preposition and one with one. This is also highlighted towards the end of the lesson where his final question is again broad: Could you mention prepositions that you know? It is surprising that interaction in the lesson continues smoothly. Presumably, the teacher and students are used to each other.

There are 6 comprehension questions in this lesson. There are 2 questions which are difficult to categorize. These are expressive questions 'Can you imagine the car running on top of the mountain?' There are no application and higher order questions in this lesson.

4.3.3 SCAFFOLDING

As mentioned in the previous lessons, scaffolding seems to be rather weak. To start with, the

structure of his questions is sometimes confusing to the researcher. For example, even when he wants students to display information, the teacher structures his questions in such a way that students interpret that they have to confirm or deny a preposition:

T: Are there any other prepositions?

SS: Yes, sir.

T: Can you identify prepositions?

S14: Yes, sir.

(4/5: 06-08-1998)

Instead of pursuing his questions, he leaves them hanging and moves on to the next ones. Not only does he fail to pursue his questions but also fails to clarify and provide feedback to these students. This is illustrated in the following interaction:

T: Can you make complete sentences?

S12: I am sitting on top of the world.

S22: He will not pass unless he works hard.

T: Do you agree with her?

SS: No, sir, yes, sir.

T: Why?

S33: It is a preposition sir.

T: Okay, we will talk about that preposition later. Could you mention the prepositions that you know? [Students mention them in turn and the lesson ends.]

(4/5: 06-08-1998)

It seems in this excerpt that students do not know whether ‘unless’ is a preposition or not. But the teacher neither provides feedback nor explains that unless is not a preposition.

Although scaffolding appeared to be rather weak, students participated more than in the novel lessons. In fact, my field notes indicate that students responded to every single question that the teacher asked in this lesson. Almost every student was actively involved in the lesson in one way or another: writing on the board, reading sentences and answering questions.

4.4 LESSON 5 - POETRY (see the poem in Appendix D)

This lesson was different from the other 4 lessons that I had observed in that the mood was gloomy and attendance bad. In my field notes, I had recorded the following:

It is Friday morning and students prepare for their first poetry lesson; Roy Campbell's poem, 'The Serf.' As they settle down, I realize that 20 out of 36 students have come to school. Others are absent because the government, through Radio Lesotho, had announced on Thursday that there would be no school on Friday but later the government had a change of mind. Unfortunately, some students have not heard of these changes. As the lesson begins, the teacher asks a student to read the poem and the teacher asks questions which provide some background information about the poet. About 3 students have not brought their poetry books.

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

As illustrated above, the situation in the country was tense and this could have affected the way the teacher asked questions and how students responded to those questions. This lesson was a double period and the teacher asked a total of 111 questions, 2 of which had been asked by students and redirected by the teacher to the class as a whole.

4.4.1 THE LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

Concerning the communicative functions of questions, the teacher tends to ask far more display than referential questions in this lesson: there are 59 display and 13 referential questions (see Appendix C). This supports Long and Sato's findings that ESL teachers ask more display than referential questions.

The number of comprehension checks seems to be almost equal to the number of confirmation checks: there are 6 comprehension checks and 5 confirmation checks but there are no clarification requests.

There appear to be more expressive questions in this lesson than in the previous lessons. The total

number is 10 in this lesson while it is 11 in the other 4 lessons.

The teacher asked more rhetorical questions in this lesson than in any of the others. He asked 17 such questions, for example:

T: What is described about him? He is a somnambulist. He ploughs the fields and knows for sure that tired as he is, he will finally finish equally. It is in this very patience that he ploughs down palaces, thrones and towers, that is, he shall finally get his freedom. His wounds are deeper because he has been insulted for so long. As he ploughs, he thinks of the insults. He has been working for the land owner and all these years, he has been insulted. And the insults inflicted pain in his heart more than anything.

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

The teacher justifies the use of rhetorical questions with the claim that students are unable to answer the questions themselves. In his response to my analysis, he demonstrates this:

Yes, there is another comment I remember. A certain authority said, perhaps questioning and answering, the teacher giving answers, can stifle or muffle the understanding of the kids, or something like that. But at the same time, it might help them because they may not know the answer. So, if you keep on pushing that they give answers and they do not know the answers, it might be time consuming.

(M: 22-08-1998)

He goes on to say that “one way or the other, you need to break the silence.” It is therefore not surprising that he has answered his own questions. I had observed in my field notes that he did not ask students whose hands were up, and I asked the teacher about this in the interview. He responded that such students may have tried to “monopolize answers.” This shows that he intentionally answers his own questions.

The teacher also remarked that my presence may have inhibited the learners and made them more passive. This may be true, however, they were actively involved in the grammar lesson, and I was

present there too.

There is only 1 question which is difficult to categorize in this lesson. A question, 'Do we find South Africa in South Africa?' is difficult to understand its intention and therefore difficult to categorize. It is presumably part of the teacher's humorous style and perhaps not really a question at all.

With regard to the cognitive domain, it will be seen that a large proportion of the teacher's questions is at the lowest levels of cognition (remembering and comprehension) in this lesson. For example, there are 57 questions at the remembering level and 35 at the comprehension level. The interaction below shows examples of knowledge questions:

- T: Who has written this poem?
SS: Roy Campbell.
T: He comes from which country?
SS: South Africa.
T: Where do we find South Africa?
SS: In Africa
T: Where in Africa?
SS: In Southern Africa.
T: Do we find South Africa in South Africa?
SS: [Laugh and do not respond.]

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

Though the lower levels (remembering and comprehension) are important and serve as a basis on which to move to the upper levels of cognition (synthesis and evaluation) (Dlamini 1994), the teacher may have asked a greater proportion of lower level questions than is desired. In my interview with a student, he illustrates this point:

Yes, I think I understood part of the poem, especially eh, I mean the questions which were about the poet and his nationality. [Laughs.] They were too easy....The answers were given in the book and we had to check the answers. That was too easy.

(N: 22-08-1998)

The least number of the teacher's questions are at the analysis level of cognition. The teacher asks only 2 questions at this level. Examples of such questions include: 'How can he [the serf] be naked and yet we are told that his naked skin clothed him?' and 'We know that clouds are in the sky and flowers are here for romance, how come now that they are united, flowers and clouds?' However, there are no questions at the application, synthesis and evaluation levels.

There are 17 questions which are difficult to categorize. These include referential questions which require personal response such as 'Have you ever been insulted?' 'How did you feel?' 'So you mean whenever you are insulted you are angry?' One would expect to find questions of this nature in a literature lesson.

4.4.2 SCAFFOLDING

There seems to be very little evidence of scaffolding in this lesson. A closer examination of the excerpt below indicates that the teacher does attempt to contextualize by providing the poet's background:

- T: Okay, I saw your hand is up or your hand is slightly soft. [Laughs.] Anyway, who is going to read for us?
- S4 [Reads the poem.]
- T: Who has written this poem?
- SS: Roy Campbell.
- T: He comes from which country?
- SS: South Africa.
- T: Where do we find South Africa?
- SS: In Africa.
- T: Where in Africa?
- SS: In Southern Africa.

T: Do we find South Africa in South Africa?

SS: [Laugh and do not respond.]

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

However, he neglects the background information about the poem, something that might have been crucial at this introductory stage. The background is provided later in the lesson - but too late - not as a context, grounding or setting the scene:

T: What is the poem about?

S1: To freedom the serf from his nakedness.

T: In this poem the serf was the oppressed and was very poor while the land owner was very rich. The poet places it within the right context. In most cases, serfs were servants. So, serfs were to produce food. And this took place in South Africa... He uses the word 'his.' To whom does it [his] refer?

SS: The serf.

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

He uses a lot of prompts, gives clues and asks easier questions. Prompts are seen as beneficial in scaffolding (Nuttall 1996). The interaction below illustrates the point:

T: ...So, this slow sleepwalker, this ploughman, this somnambulist, the serf, drives, he is driving through the green. That is, he ploughs. His grooves, a groove is a cut, he is cutting the furrow. What colour is the furrow?

S7: Red.

T: What makes you think the furrow is red? Which word designates 'red?' Which word means red? Yes, I am told men are colour blind. Don't you know that? You only know royal blue? If something is rusty, what colour is that? If something is rusty, what colour is that? If something is rubric, what colour is that? If it is crimson, what colour is that?

SS: Red.

T: They all mean red...

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

It can be seen that in the above excerpt, through his prompting technique, he makes explicit the meaning of the word 'crimson.' It is surprising though, that in the interviews with the 4 students, all of them demonstrated their failure to grasp the word. Perhaps if he had actively involved the students, he could have assessed their understanding and they may have remembered the meaning of the word.

Concept development is an essential aspect of scaffolding. Instead of preparing the students for the poem, surveying the title, 'The Serf', and making predictions about it, he simply asked students to read it. He then asked them to summarize it, 'What is the poem about?' Because of the difficulty of the vocabulary, the students were unable to answer this question. In my interview with the 4 students, they all demonstrated this:

Some of the questions were difficult....The question which is about 'The Serf.' I do not know the serf, I do not know what it means. So, I do not understand the question.

(K: 22-08-1998)

The one that talked about, eh, the one which said we had to explain what 'The Serf' is about. I did not know how to answer that one. I found it difficult. I am still not sure if I know what it means.

(N: 22-08-1998)

I found the poem very difficult....Questions such as, 'What is the serf?' I found that very difficult. I checked the meaning from my friends and the dictionary but I did not understand the meaning. My friend said she did not understand that question...

(L: 22-08-1998)

I did not understand the one which said, 'What is the poem about?' I didn't understand that one....The problem was that I did not understand the poem.

(J: 22-08-1998)

It is worth noting that, although these four students demonstrated their lack of understanding of some concepts, they all felt that they could have told their teacher that they had not understood.

The teacher knows the poem well but does not have the opportunity to assess students' understanding because of his excessive use of rhetorical questions. The excerpt below illustrates both his good understanding and detailed explanation of the poem, and his use of rhetorical questions.

T: This poem is very political. "I see in the slow progress over toppled clouds" [He reads.] This slow progress, **where does it take place?** It takes place over toppled clouds and falling

flowers because although he is a sleepwalker, very slow sleepwalker, the animals are equally slow because we are told of the ‘patient hooves.’ The word patient shows how slow they are. Furthermore, even the progress itself is very slow. This progress of people ploughing, the movement is made simply of the toppled clouds over falling flowers. **Then what does this person see?** He sees timeless patience of the hooves. The fact that he is patient shows how long he had endured the insults: he has been working so hard for so long. He has always taken his time to work. “I see in the slow progress.” **What does he see in the progress?** He sees the timeless patience of the hooves. **Where does this progress take place?** It takes place over toppled clouds of falling flowers. And then what causes this timeless patience, this progress? **What will the serf do with the timeless patience?** This is what he does. This patience, which is so timeless, moves in furrows to the naked earth, meaning he finishes his work. He digs, finishes, moves, walks to the naked earth. The naked earth is being ploughed now, now naked because he has taken away a bunch of flowers, toppled them, turned them upside down, So, the land is no longer naked, no longer covered, he has ploughed other plants. **What else does this timeless patience do?** It ploughs down palaces, thrones and towers...

(5/5: 07-08-1998)

However, in my interview with the four students, they all said that most of the teacher’s questions were difficult, as is highlighted below:

Some of the questions were difficult, like the one which said ‘Where does this progress take place?’ I did not know that one, I don’t know what they mean by toppled clouds....I don’t understand how a person can be on top of the clouds...The other one was about plants and falling flowers, the plants that were on the land the serf was ploughing. Eh, something like that. I did not know why the flowers were falling.

(J: 22-08-1998)

The questions were very difficult. Even the one which said ‘What are puffs?’ and then talked about patient hooves, I just thought that puffs were water and drops of water, and when he talked about puffs and patient hooves, I thought that he meant drops of water.

(L: 22-08-1998)

Another question which was difficult was about the thrones and palaces. It said ‘What does this timeless patience do? I find that difficult, even the answer was difficult. This poem is very difficult.

(N: 22-08-1998)

I did not understand the questions that were asked. I think that I did not participate because I did not understand the poem. Although I said I was sleeping, I was listening, but I did not understand the poem.

(J: 22-08-1998)

The above responses demonstrate the impact rhetorical questions may have on students. Regardless of the wonderful explanations the teacher provides, in the interview with the students, they all pointed out their lack of understanding.

Despite the weak scaffolding in the lesson, the students had a good relationship with the teacher and were not frightened of asking questions. Even those who admitted to being passive said they were not afraid of asking their teacher. However, some demonstrated their discomfort of asking or answering questions as they were either shy or had problems related to voice projection. This is illustrated in the following extract:

Sometimes they do not hear me when I try to answer questions. I don't feel comfortable, I have to repeat many times because I cannot speak louder....But I decided to give myself time to ask him when we have afternoon studies. I will explain that I did not understand the poem, I mean parts of the poem.

(J: 22-08-1998)

It should be remembered that due to the country's instability, afternoon studies and afternoon classes had been cancelled.

4.5 DISCUSSION: DRAWING THE THREADS TOGETHER

It is important to note that the 3 forms of analysis discussed earlier, share a common feature, which has to do with the control the teacher has on classroom interaction. What emerges in these lessons is that the teacher asks most of the questions, and this is true of all the 3 lesson types. It is worth noting that both the number and the type of questions asked, varied from lesson to lesson. For example, the teacher-student ratio in the lesson on the novel is 105: 2, and 111: 2 on the poetry lesson, while the teacher asked all 16 questions in the grammar lesson.

It is, nevertheless, important to note that students are not 'scared' to ask questions. There is a good relationship between the teacher and learners. As Ellis (1987: 127) puts it, "second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency." When learners ask him a question, the teacher takes control, and redirects it to the class as a whole. This may be crucial in engaging students in the interaction. However, it may also discourage learners from asking questions.

Another important finding is that the type of questions asked by the teacher vary according to the purpose of the lesson, even when the topic is the same, for example, the novel. As discussed earlier, there are more referential than display questions in lesson 1. This indicates that one cannot talk about a simple distinction between referential and display questions without taking into consideration contextual factors when analysing classroom interaction. There is no doubt that the distinction is essential, but it is difficult to generalize about patterns of use since one cannot ignore the purpose and the nature of the lesson. Furthermore, my findings do not support the conclusions drawn about the effects of referential questions by Brock (cited in Nunan and Lamb 1996) and Long and Sato (1983). Brock found that the use of referential questions by teachers resulted in more complex language by students and that students' interaction was more like natural discourse. He proposes that teachers be trained to ask more referential questions because the number of referential questions may prompt students to provide significantly longer and syntactically more complex sentences. There is evidence in lesson 1 that learners did not provide longer sentences yet the teachers asked more referential questions. In fact, the mean length of students' responses to such questions was 2 words while it was

1.5 for display questions. What appears to be a major finding in this lesson is that referential questions which require personal response may elicit shorter responses. Again the reasons for this may be contextual. It may be doubtful, therefore, to claim that referential questions elicit longer sentences.

On the other hand, Long and Sato argue that questions which require a personal response are good in that they may promote conversation. While one cannot deny that, when it comes to teaching a novel, conversational or anecdotal or personal digressions may be distracting.

It should also be noted that the teacher asks only display questions in the grammar lesson, and more display than referential questions in the poetry lesson. It is not surprising that there are display questions in the grammar lesson because, although grammar teaching often “involves abstraction and what Vygotsky calls conceptual thinking” (Cope and Kalantzis 1993: 80), it also typically requires right or wrong answers. However, the number of display questions may also reflect on the teaching strategy that is involved.

With regard to poetry, it may be problematic to include more referential questions. Poems often contain obscure language that may require teachers to display rather than seek information. This is not to say, though, that challenging referential questions are not essential in the teaching and learning of poetry.

As indicated earlier, when the teacher perceives that a text is at a high level of difficulty, he does not encourage participation but asks rhetorical questions. Although the teacher’s comment that one has

“to break the silence” cannot be ignored, the fact that the teacher answers his own questions may have a damaging effect on the students’ understanding and teaching as a whole. There is ample evidence that the teacher offers good explanations to his own questions. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss the fact that this prevents him from assessing students’ understanding; he does involve them in the interaction, and therefore, their lack of understanding is not made obvious to him although it is revealed to the researcher.

In fact, the teacher does not follow up unclear students’ utterances with requests for clarification. Maybe his main concern is transmission rather than understanding what learners have to contribute. Even when he perceives a high level of difficulty, he neither pursues nor provides feedback. More requests for clarification and feedback from students would achieve more in terms of the linguistic-cognitive nature of interaction. Unfortunately, confirmation checks seem to be his preference, possibly as a means of avoiding loss of face on the part of students.

Drawing on the cognitive depth of questions, most of the questions are fairly low. One of the purposes of a classroom, is to further the knowledge and understanding of children about the topics, which implicitly stated, constitute the curriculum (Edwards and Mercer 1987). This teacher feels that knowledge and comprehension questions may help him cover what is in the syllabus and ultimately provide him with a strong base to move to higher order questions. However, there was little evidence of higher order questions. While it is true that they are important, low order questions cannot on their own prepare students for independent learning or examinations. There is a common assumption in ESL teaching that ESL learners will not understand higher order questions; as a result, teachers’ questions remain at the comprehension level. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to hold learners

back. The combination of low order and rhetorical questions, gives the appearance of learning but it denies learners the opportunity to work things out for themselves. The evidence for this can be drawn from the teacher's response to the interview, where he comments that his questions are based on the level of the students, thus implying that they do not have sufficient language proficiency. This contradicts what he had told me earlier about their language capabilities. During my first visit to the school he said, "These students are not bad, I think they are above average." This is not to say they may not have any language problem, but obviously they do not qualify as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students (Wong-Fillmore 1985). It is crucial at this juncture, for teachers, to abandon myths about ESL learners. One also needs to take into consideration their learning potential.

What seems interesting though, is that although I found it difficult at times to follow the lessons, the learners appear to know what is going on. This illustrates the importance of context, especially what has gone before in the joint construction of knowledge between this teacher and his students.

It is also worth noting that there are questions which seem to be difficult to categorize. Sometimes, we have to consider context and content to work out the functions of questions. As Edwards and Mercer (1987: 160) point out, "common knowledge" is constructed through joint activity and discourse. They further argue that it is through discourse and joint action, that two or more people build a body of common language which becomes the contextual basis for further communication. Thus, things 'out there' become contextual only when they are evoked - referred to, assumed or implied in what is communicated.

With regard to scaffolding, there is an attempt by the teacher to scaffold learning. He draws on students' personal experiences, offers clues and also asks closed questions to support learners in the interaction. All these can be beneficial parts of scaffolding (Edwards and Mercer 1987; Nuttall 1996; Poole 1996). However, there are several aspects in the lessons which could have been improved. Lesson scaffolds need to be explicit, accessible to students and patterned in predictable ways (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). The teacher could have prepared different types of questions for different stages. For example, in the early stages of the poem, he could have helped learners to survey the title and predict what was likely to occur in the poem. As Cope and Kalantzis (1993: 80) point out, "prediction is crucial if students are to have some degree of control over their work and the autonomy to keep on going without more instructions from the teacher." In fact, scaffolding is "focussed on enabling students to develop, move to the next level, never doing for them what they are capable of doing for themselves with a little support" (Nuttall 1996: 36). In the light of the above arguments, one may propose a plan in which the teacher's questions are organized in such a way that they are part of the construction of the lesson as a whole.

It may also be important to note that what may have weakened scaffolding in the 3 lesson types is that the lessons do not seem to be clearly focussed. In line with the principles of scaffolding, the lessons should be goal oriented. This is against Long and Sato's concern, though, that they should be more like conversations to promote the communicative functions during interaction. Perhaps one needs to understand that certain things which are geared towards the linguistic aspects of learning seem to contradict the way one requires to teach subject matter. It should also be understood that I do not argue that scaffolding is the best approach to teaching. It is doubtful whether such a claim would be

acceptable. However, it is my contention that if scaffolding is used effectively, it may yield better results.

It is important to bear in mind that the way the teacher asks questions is directed at creating humour. He generates humour in a culturally specific way. It is worth noting that the learners seem to enjoy it, especially the boys. Humour is important in language teaching in creating a conducive learning atmosphere. Therefore, any kind of analysis should take into account the purpose for which questions are asked.

CHAPTER 5

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss and draw conclusions from the main findings which emerged in the analysis of the three lesson types observed. The discussion focusses on the theory of teachers' questions in general and the practical implications which relate to the main findings. Furthermore, the limitations of the research are considered along with the insights gained during the investigation. However, it should be remembered that the main findings have already been discussed in the preceding chapter. So, during the discussion, only key points will be highlighted.

5.2 FINDINGS THAT SUPPORT RESEARCH ON TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

What is revealed in the methodology on a teacher's questions is that it is sometimes difficult to classify questions. The findings indicate how classification depends on the context in which the teacher is operating. As discussed in the preceding chapter, unless one is familiar with the context and the content of the subject matter, it is often difficult to distinguish between question types, for example, referential or display, higher order or low order, comprehension checks or clarification requests. Brock, cited in Nunan and Lamb (1996) suggests the need to train teachers to ask more referential questions as such questions produce better results. But in the context of my research, students did not produce longer utterances although they were asked more referential than display questions. This shows that the way the questions are framed may not necessarily affect the learners' responses in the way anticipated. Moreover, the findings also show how subjective it is to classify a teacher's questions. As discussed in the previous chapter, the way questions are structured also makes them difficult to analyse.

The findings suggest that Van Lier (1988) is right in saying that one must go beyond a superficial analysis of questions to a consideration of their purposes and effects and socio-cultural context in which they occur. In the three lesson types discussed earlier, questions varied according to the teacher's intentions, even when the topic was the same. Van Lier suggests a need to consider the educational situation, such as the amount of work, the level of students, and the intentions of the teacher as well. Moreover, the findings reveal that the way the teacher asks questions is related to his role and ideology. In the three lesson types for example, he asked low order, in Bloom's terms, or display questions, in Long and Sato's terms. The teacher said he wanted the learners to recall the

text, and that students did not know the answers. This indicates the need to consider the teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning. Therefore there is a need to study teacher's questions in a natural context because a teacher's questions depend on the values, the beliefs and the assumptions s/he has of the education system.

The findings also reveal the need to take ethical issues into consideration. There were critical issues concerning my colleagues who were inquisitive to know about the teacher I observed. Had I done research in a different school, this may not have been a problem. However, doing research in my own school was beneficial in that I knew the teachers already and was therefore able to deal with them. I also gained access and entry to the school and research participants without undue difficulty, even though the general political climate in Lesotho was unstable.

5.3 INSIGHTS GAINED

This research is a small scale study, and therefore it is difficult to generalize from it. However, there is more value which can be attached to it. Like any other second language acquisition research (SLAR), it may be of greater relevance to teacher development (Ellis 1993). As teachers and researchers, we need to know what happens in the context in which we work. I learnt the need for training teachers about how to ask questions and the importance of planning and preparing questions in advance. In fact, I learnt how to put theory into practice.

During the interview with the teacher, he also acknowledged its relevance and therefore its value to him. This is highlighted below:

So, I am thankful for some points that you raised. There are times when one needs to do some soul searching to perhaps tally what you have said and examine it and perhaps try it another time to see whether it can work out...

(M: 22-08-1998)

The above response shows that research of this nature can be a learning process and a form of consciousness raising for teachers and researchers. However, it is not only useful to them but also to learners as well. In the stimulated recall interviews with the students, all four students interviewed pointed out the need to ask their teacher if they did not understand. Although, they all agreed that some questions were difficult, they all said they would take the initiative to ask their teacher or friends.

5.4 EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that Thompson (1997) and Ellis (1990) correctly assert the need to train teachers how to ask questions. As indicated earlier, I received no training on how to ask questions, whether oral or written. Although I did not ask whether the teacher had received any training on teachers' questions, this may be presumably true for him since we share an almost identical educational background. Teachers need more training on how to ask questions. As O'Neill (1991) puts it, questioning is crucial and yet a neglected skill. We cannot divorce the teacher's questions from the training s/he received. In the preceding chapter, it was seen how knowledgeable the teacher was about literature and how good his explanations were. Clearly, however, knowing the content matter is not enough in ESL teaching, one has to build on this, and employ a strategy which may help learners with concepts, and teachers' questions are central to the active and meaningful reception of concepts. This reflects the significance of questions in English language teaching (Krause 1997). The university and teachers' colleges have to take this into consideration as well. At NUL, a student-

teacher has to major in either Literature in English or Language. Although this may be beneficial, it may have negative impacts on the teacher, the school and perhaps students. At school, teachers are expected to teach both, regardless of what their option at university was, and therefore there is always contradiction between teaching and training. I believe that educators need to link theory into research and ultimately theory into practice. Even teachers of literature need to understand the role of questions in linguistic and cognitive development.

On the other hand, in ESL classrooms where a teacher is often the major source of input, s/he needs to plan questions carefully since effective questions and questioning strategies are integral parts of good teaching and learning (Dillon 1990). Training as preparation for careful questioning behaviour is crucial since questions play a major role in classroom interaction and in providing input (Long and Sato 1983; Pica and Long 1986).

5.5 LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to the research. As stated in the methodology section, students' responses were very short. Although it may be difficult to say why this was so, perhaps it is the way I carried out the research. Possibly, the fact that the interviews were in English, a foreign language, contributed to this. However, as it has been discussed earlier, they did not seem to have poor language proficiency. Perhaps one may take into account that it is a cultural attribute - reluctance to talk fully to an older person, the researcher.

Moreover, my role as the teacher-researcher may have affected their way of talking. During my

experience as a teacher, I observed that students prefer not to talk a lot with their teachers, but rather with their peers. So, somehow my presence might have affected their way of speaking. This is also demonstrated in the teacher's response to the analysis that my presence may have affected the way they participated in class. In the stimulated recall interview with the teacher, he said:

...Whatever we did in this class had a direct bearing on a foreigner like yourself....Eh, had you not been there, they could have continued as usual, but in most cases, even those who were sometimes capable of answering, were afraid to respond, perhaps thinking that they may get the answers wrong, and then it might do otherwise to them, perhaps their prestige.

(M: 22-08-1998)

Another problem was the political situation in the country. Perhaps my interviews with the teacher could have improved if the time constraints (resulting from shortened school hours and shopping hours, to replace the batteries) had not compelled me to rush things. What I learnt from this is that the technical device should be both electric and battery operated in case of problems like these. But also, researchers need training into how to conduct research, and that can only be gained through a lot of practice. This may explain why the interviews with students were short as during my pilot study, I had not interviewed students. So, I did not anticipate responses like that.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Questions play an essential role during the teaching-learning process: during interaction and as a source of input. Since questions play an important role in learning a L2, teachers need to plan their questions carefully. What is also important is that analysis of teachers' questions is difficult and subjective, and that the intentions, curriculum and other pedagogical factors cannot be ignored when analysing teachers' questions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A1

Condensed Version of the
Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
Cognitive Domain
KNOWLEDGE

1. KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, as defined here, involves the recall of specifics and universals, the recall of methods and processes, or the recall of a pattern, structure, or setting. For measurement purposes, the recall situation involves little more than bringing to mind the appropriate material. Although some alteration of the material may be required, this is a relatively minor part of the task. The knowledge objectives emphasize most the psychological processes of remembering. The process of relating is also involved in that a knowledge test situation requires the organization and reorganization of a problem such that it will furnish the appropriate signals and cues for the information and knowledge the individual possesses. To use an analogy, if one thinks of the mind as a file, the problem in a knowledge test situation is that of finding in the problem or task the appropriate signals, cues, and clues which will most effectively bring out whatever knowledge is filed or stored.

1.1 KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFICS

the recall of specific and isolable bits of information. The emphasis is on symbols with concrete referents. This material which is at very low level of abstraction, may be thought of as the elements from which more complex and abstract forms of knowledge are built.

1.1.1 KNOWLEDGE OF TERMINOLOGY

Knowledge of the referents for specific symbols (verbal and non-verbal). This may include knowledge of the most generally accepted symbol referent, knowledge of the variety of symbols which may be used for a single referent, or knowledge of the referent most appropriate to a given use of a symbol.

*To define technical terms by giving their attributes, properties, or relations.

*Familiarity with a large number of words in their common range of meanings.

1.1.2 KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFIC FACTS

Knowledge of dates, events, persons, places, etc. This may include very precise and specific information such as the specific date or exact magnitude of a phenomenon. It may also include approximate or relative information such as an approximate time period or the general order of magnitude of a phenomenon.

*The recall of major facts about particular cultures.

*The possession of a minimum knowledge about the organisms studies in the laboratory.¹

1.2 KNOWLEDGE OF WAYS AND MEANS OF DEALING WITH SPECIFICS

Knowledge of the ways of organizing, studying, judging, and criticizing. This includes the methods of inquiry, the chronological sequences, and the standards of judgment within a field as well as the patterns of organization through which the areas of the fields themselves are determined and internally organized. This knowledge is at an intermediate level of abstraction between specific knowledge on the one hand and knowledge of universals on the other. It does not so much demand the activity of the student in using the material as it does a more passive awareness of their nature.

1.2.1 KNOWLEDGE OF CONVENTIONS

Knowledge of characteristic ways of treating and presenting ideas and phenomena. For purposes of communication and consistency, workers in a field employ usages, styles, practices, and forms which best suit their purposes and/or which appear to suit best the phenomena with which they deal. It should be recognized that although these forms and conventions are likely to be set up on arbitrary, accident, or authoritative bases, they are retained because of the general agreement or concurrence of individuals concerned with the subject, phenomena, or problem.

Illustrative educational objectives selected from the literature.

*Familiarity with the forms and conventions of the major types of works, e.g., verses, plays, scientific papers, etc.

*To make pupils conscious of correct form and usage in speech and writing.

1.2.2 KNOWLEDGE OF TRENDS AND SEQUENCES

Knowledge of the processes, directions, and movements of phenomena with respect to time.

*Understanding of the continuity and development of American culture as exemplified in American life.

*Knowledge of the basic trends underlying the development of public assistance programs.

1.2.3 KNOWLEDGE OF CLASSIFICATIONS AND CATEGORIES

Knowledge of the classes, sets, divisions, and arrangements which are regarded as fundamental for a given subject field, purpose, argument, or problem.

*To recognize the area encompassed by various kinds of problems or materials.

*Becoming familiar with a range of types of literature.

1.2.4 KNOWLEDGE OF CRITERIA

Knowledge of the criteria by which facts, principles, opinions, and conduct are tested or judged.

*Familiarity with criteria for judgement appropriate to the type of work and the purpose for which it is read.

*Knowledge of criteria for the evaluation of recreational activities.

1.2.5 KNOWLEDGE OF METHODOLOGY

Knowledge of the methods of inquiry, techniques, and procedures employed in a particular subject field as well as those employed in investigating particular problems and phenomena. The emphasis here is on the individual's knowledge of the method rather than his ability to use the method.

* Knowledge of scientific methods for evaluating health concepts.

*The student shall know the methods of attack relevant to the kinds of problems of concern to the social sciences.

1.3 KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSALS AND ABSTRACTIONS IN A FIELD

Knowledge of the major schemes and patterns by which phenomena and ideas are organized. These are the large structures, theories, and generalization which dominate a subject field or which are quite generally used in studying phenomena or solving problems. These are at the highest levels of abstraction and complexity.

1.3.1 KNOWLEDGE OF PRINCIPLES AND GENERALIZATIONS

Knowledge of particular abstractions which summarize observations of phenomena. These are the abstractions which are of value in explaining, describing, predicting, or in determining the most appropriate and relevant action or direction to be taken.

*Knowledge of the important principles by which our experience with biological phenomena is summarized.

*The recall of major generalizations about particular cultures.

1.3.2 KNOWLEDGE OF THEORIES AND STRUCTURES

Knowledge of the body of principles and generalizations together with their interrelations which present a clear, rounded, and systematic view of a complex phenomenon, problem, or field. These are the most abstract formulations, and they can be used to show the interrelation and organization of a great range of specifics.

*The recall of major theories about particular cultures.

*Knowledge of a relatively complete formulation of the theory of evolution.

INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES AND SKILLS

Abilities and skills refer to organized modes of operation and generalized techniques for dealing with materials and problems. The material and problems may be of such a nature that little or no

specialized and technical information is required. Such information as is required can be assumed to be part of the individual's general fund of knowledge. Other problems may require specialized and technical information at a rather high level such that specific knowledge and skill in dealing with the problem and the materials are required. The abilities and skills objectives emphasize the mental processes of organizing and reorganizing material to achieve a particular purpose. The materials may be given or remembered.

2. COMPREHENSION

This represents the lowest level of understanding. It refers to a type of understanding or apprehension such that the individual knows what is being communicated and can make use of the material or idea being communicated without necessarily relating it to other material or seeing its fullest implications.

2.1 TRANSLATION

Comprehension as evidenced by the care and accuracy with which the communication is paraphrased or rendered from one language or form of communication to another. Translation is judged on the basis of faithfulness and accuracy, that is, on the extent to which the material in the original communications is preserved although the form of the communication has been altered.

*The ability to understand non-literal statements (metaphor, symbolism, irony, exaggeration).

*Skill in translating mathematical verbal material into symbolic statements and vice versa.

2.2 INTERPRETATION

The explanation or summarization of a communication. Whereas translation involves an objective part-for-part rendering of communication, interpretation involves a reordering, rearrangement, or a new view of the material.

*The ability to grasp the thought of the work as a whole at any desired level of generality.

*The ability to interpret various types of social data.

2.3 EXTRAPOLATION

The extension of trends or tendencies beyond the given data to determine implications, consequences, corollaries, effects, etc., which are in accordance with the conditions described in the original communication.

*The ability to draw the conclusions of a work in terms of the immediate inferences made from the explicit statements.

*Skill in predicting continuation of trends.

3. APPLICATION

The use of abstractions in particular and concrete situations. The abstractions may be in the form of general ideas, rules of procedures, or generalized methods. The abstractions may also be technical principles, ideas, theories which must be remembered and applied.

*Application to the phenomena discussed in one paper of the scientific terms or concepts used in other papers.

*The ability to predict the probable effect of a change in a factor on a biological situation previously at equilibrium.

4. ANALYSIS

The breakdown of a communication into its constituent elements or parts such that the relative hierarchy of ideas is made clear and /or the relations between the ideas expressed are made explicit. Such analyses are intended to clarify the communication, to indicate how the communication is organized, and the way in which it manages to convey its effects, as well as its basis and arrangement.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF ELEMENTS

Identification of the elements included in a communication.

*The ability to recognize unstated assumptions.

*Skill in distinguishing facts from hypothesis.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The connections and interactions between elements and parts of a communication.

- *Ability to check the consistency of hypotheses with given information and assumptions.

- *Skill in comprehending the interrelationships among the ideas in a passage.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The organization, systematic arrangement, and structure which hold the communication together. This includes the “explicit” as well as “implicit” structure. It includes the bases, necessary arrangement, and the mechanics which make the communication a unit.

- *The ability to recognize form and pattern in literary or artistic works as a means of understanding their meaning.

- *Ability to recognize the general techniques used in persuasive materials, such as advertising, propaganda, etc.

5. SYNTHESIS

The putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole. This involves the process of working with pieces, parts, elements, etc., and arranging and combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before.

5.1 PRODUCTION OF A UNIQUE COMMUNICATION

The development of a communication in which the writer or speaker attempts to convey ideas, feelings, and /or experiences to others.

- *Skill in writing, using an excellent organization of ideas and statements.

- *Ability to tell a personal experience effectively.

5.2 PRODUCTION OF A PLAN, OR PROPOSED SET OF OPERATIONS

The development of a plan of work or the proposal of a plan of operations. The plan should satisfy requirements of the task which may be given to the student or which he may develop for himself.

*Ability to propose ways of testing hypothesis.

*Ability to plan a unit of instructions for a particular teaching situation.

5.3 DERIVATION OF A SET OF ABSTRACT RELATIONS

The development of a set of abstract relations either to classify to explain particular data or phenomena, or the deduction of propositions and relations from a set of basic propositions or symbolic representations.

*Ability to formulate appropriate hypotheses based upon an analysis of factors involved, and to modify such hypothesis in the light of new factors and considerations.

*Ability to make mathematical discoveries and generalizations.

6. EVALUATION

Judgements about the value of material and methods for given purposed. Quantitative and qualitative judgements about the extent to which material and methods satisfy criteria. Use of a standard pf appraisal. The criteria may be those determined by the student or those which are given to him.

6.1 JUDGEMENTS IN TERMS OF INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Evaluation of the accuracy of a communication from such evidence as logical accuracy consistency, and other internal criteria.

*Judging by internal standards, the ability to assess general probability of accuracy in reporting facts from the care given to exactness of statement, documentation, proof, etc.

*The ability to indicate logical fallacies in arguments.

6.2 JUDGEMENTS IN TERMS OF EXTERNAL CRITERIA

Evaluation of material with reference to selected or remembered criteria.

*The comparison of major theories, generalizations, and facts about particular cultures.

*Judging by external standards, the ability to compare a work with the highest known standards in its field especially with other works of recognized excellence.

From Bloom, B (1956)

APPENDIX A2

Category name	Type of Thinking Expected	Samples
Knowledge (remembering)	Student simply recalls or recognizes information as it was learned.	"Define...." "What is the capital of ...?" "Who was the first ...?" "What did the text say about...?"
Comprehension (understanding)	Student demonstrates understanding of the material; questions require mental reorganization or interpretation, not just recall.	"Explain in your own words..." "Compare...." "What is the main idea of...?" "Describe what you saw...."
Application (solving)	Student uses information to solve a problem. A single correct answer is expected.	"Which principle is demonstrated in ...?" "Given the length and width, calculate...." "Apply the rules of...to solve the following...."
Analysis (analysing)	Students must think critically; identify reasons, motives; make an inference based upon several bits of information; take apart a conclusion to see if it is supported by evidence.	"What factors influenced the writings of...?" "Why was Washington, D.C. chosen?" "Which of the following are facts and which are opinions?" "Based upon your experiment, what is the chemical...?"
Synthesis (creating)	Student performs original thinking, creates an original plan, proposal, design, story and so on. No single correct answer.	"What's a good name for this...?" "How could we raise money for...?" "What would the United States be like if the South had won...?"
Evaluation (judging)	Student judges the merit of an idea, offers an opinion, uses standards to evaluate a product or idea.	"Which U.S. Senator is the most effective?" "Should students be given choices in...?" "Which painting do you prefer?" "Why would you favour...?"

From Woolfolk (1984)

APPENDIX B1

Transcript 1

Questions	Linguistic	Cognitive	Comments
1. Where is Seraki and what did he do?	Display	Knowledge	No frame of reference, therefore vague question. Which chapter referred to?
2. Anything about Seraki?	Referential	Knowledge	Unclear question.
3. What impression do you get?	Referential	Analysis	Vague, unclear question. Impression about Seraki, his brother or prison?
4. What is the name of his brother?	Display	Knowledge	Clear and straight forward question.
5. How come that Phakane is in prison yet Seraki is able to talk to him?	Display	Knowledge	Clear, simple question.
6. How come that Phakane is in prison but it is possible for Seraki to see him?	Display	Knowledge	Question rephrased.
7. Are you working alone there?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Control
8. Who is your neighbour?	Expressive	difficult to categorize	No frame of reference.
9. Is Seraki a Naughty Boy?	Display	Comprehension	Clear, simple question.

10. How come, yet we are told that the Naughty Boys are difficult?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question. No link with previous questions.
11. How is it possible for a criminal like King Danny?	Display	Knowledge	Vague, unclear question. Possible to do what?
12. Where do we get the information?	Display	Knowledge	Clear, simple question.
13. How do we know that the Naughty Boys bribed the police?	Display	Knowledge	Very clear.
14. Are you guessing that King Danny bribed the police?	Expressive	Comprehension	Wants to confirm if students understood.
15. You are not guessing?	Expressive	Comprehension	Wants to confirm.
16. How do we know that the naughty Boys had influence so far as the book is concerned?	Display	Knowledge	Rephrasing the question.
17. While Auntie Somoza is telling us, how come she tells us?	Referential	Analysis	Clear and straightforward question.
18. Was she telling us because we are readers?	Referential	Analysis	Vague question, already answering the first?
19. Was she saying I want you to have the information, the Naughty Boys are capable of this and that?	Referential	Analysis	Trying to give students a hint by rephrasing a question.

20. Was she telling you to store it?	Referential	Analysis	Do they know the meaning of the word store?
21. How come?	Referential	Analysis	Clear question.
22. From your own experience, how come Auntie Somoza had that information?	Display	Comprehension	Confusing question. Information given in the book yet the question says from experience.
23. Do you think so?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Checks understanding of text and confirms understanding.
24. Do you think that Naughty Boys were at the shebeen and she talking to them?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Checks understanding of text.
25. Any other answer?	Referential	Comprehension	Clear question.
26. Would you have a Naughty Girl?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Not useful in the context.
27. Any answer different from yes?	Expressive	Comprehension	Wants to go beyond knowledge and comprehension.
28. Is that the case?	Confirmation check	Comprehension	Confirms and checks understanding.
29. Is it true (calls a student by name)?	Confirmation check	Comprehension	Check understanding.
30. What is another place where you can get information?	Referential	Application	Question contextualized

31. Who is this third person?	Display	Knowledge	Clear, simple question.
32. Half-face, where is he?	Display	Knowledge	Clear, simple question.
33. If they are in this difficult situation, how does Mr Nzule feel?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Teacher answers his own question.
34. Is he happy about Seraki?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
35. Does it happen in real life that there are some things in which you are involved and you do not want your parents to know?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Question contextualized
36. For example?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Question contextualized
37. Sometimes you attend Sephiri church like you call it and parents do not know?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
38. When do you go to such a church?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
39. At night, how come you go at night and parents do not know?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Clear question.
40. Are you allowed to take people there?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
41. Who can look like an adult?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Vague, unclear question.
42. How do adults look like?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Question rephrased.

43. Are they different from us?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Repeated and rephrased question.
44. How, just because they are big?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Providing hints.
45. How are they different from us?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Question rephrased.
46. How does an adult look differently from us?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Repeated and rephrased question.
47. You mean if you see two faces you can tell this one belongs to an adult and the other one to a child?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Repeated and rephrased question.
48. How? How can you differentiate them?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Repeated and rephrased question.
49. Two meats?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Question repeated.
50. By looking at this you can see those two meats?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Question repeated.
51. Ah, the moment I see someone with a rough face I must conclude that he is an adult?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Repeats student's response.
52. So, adults have rough faces?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Confirms understanding
53. How can you hide someone inside you?	Referential	Knowledge	Personal response.
54. What is to fast?	Display	Knowledge	Redirects a student's question to the class.

55. The moment you stop eating, is that fasting?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Confirms understanding
56. Is there any person in the story you know who fasted?	Referential	Knowledge	Ambiguous question. Which story is referred to?
57. Which Tsotang?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Unclear (Tsotang is not in the story but their classmate).
58. Do you know if Tsotang once fasted?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
59. She tells you?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
60. Another one?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Unclear - another what? (another question or another person who fasted).
61. You fasted because there is no food?	Comprehension check	Difficult to categorize	Giving students a hint, checking understanding.
62. When did Tsotang stop eating?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Check understanding.
63. Don't you join her?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
64. Why not? Because you don't know why she is fasting?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
65. If you want something from God, you must fast?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.

66. So, By fasting God will realize that you need something?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
67. Is there any problem playing while hungry?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
68. How are going to listen when you are hungry?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
69. You mean God will help you when you are not satisfied?	Comprehension check	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
70. Any questions concerning our friend Seraki?	Referential	Comprehension	Clear question.
71. Which crocodile am I talking about?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
72. Any question?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Clear question.
73. How do you know that Seraki is still attending school?	Display	Application	Redirects a student's question to the class.
74. Are you one of those who said yes?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Clear question.
75. Why do you ask whether Seraki was still attending school?	Referential	Analysis	Check understanding.
76. In this school of the cast, who was jackrolled?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
77. Do you know the jackrolling song?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.

78. Could you say some few words from it?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
79. So, this is the jackrolling song, is there anyone who has the key to the song?	Referential	Knowledge	Clear question.
80. Does this song have anything to do with you?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Unclear - whether addressed to Tsotang or to the class.
81. Do you have a difficult time to learn?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Unclear question.

APPENDIX B2

Transcript 2

Questions	Linguistic	Cognitive	Comments
1. Could you ask questions?	Expressive	Comprehension	Confirm understanding.
2. Who can answer that?	Display	Knowledge	Redirects a student's question to the class.
3. What is the meaning of the blue sky?	Display	Knowledge	Question repeated.
4. Is there anyone of you who know the word blue?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
5. Have you ever seen anything blue today?	Display	Knowledge	Provides a hint.
6. Where?	Display	Knowledge	Provides a hint.
7. So, what is the meaning of the blue sky?	Display	Knowledge	Question repeated.
8. What makes you ask about the blue sky?	Referential	Analysis	Asks for opinion but repeats the question.
9. Where have you seen it?	Display	Knowledge	Guides students.
10. What does it say?	Display	Knowledge	Guides students.
11. How was he able to see the blue sky?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
12. The final question?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	No context.
13. Guys, she likes to know what does the chapter tell us about?	Display	Comprehension	Redirects a student's question to the class.
14. Does it tell us anything?	Referential	Comprehension	Question rephrased.

15. What does it tell us about?	Referential	Comprehension	Question repeated.
16. Is that the case?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Clear question.
17. By whom? Who found Phakane?	Display	Knowledge	Question rephrased.
18. King Danny found Phakane for Seraki?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
19. What did Uncle Vula fail to do?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.

APPENDIX B3

Transcript 3

Questions	Linguistic	Cognitive	Comments
1. Did you read for us?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Clear question
2. What are you talking about?	Expressive	Comprehension	Not clear.
3. Why men, what about women?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	The purpose is not clear.
4. How many of you have been arrested?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal response.
5. Stealing what?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.

APPENDIX B4

Transcript 4

Questions	Linguistic	Cognitive	Comments
1. Why do you think we used 'to'?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
2. Which means it is what?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
3. Are there any other preposition?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
4. Can you identify prepositions?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
5. What questions would you ask?	Display	Knowledge	Unclear question - concerning what?
6. Do the above sentences differ?	Display	Comprehension	Unclear question - differ in what? Meaning or structure?
7. Is there any difference between near the mountain and beside the mountain?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
8. How are they different these three roads?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
9. Can you think of sentences which have prepositions?	Display	Knowledge	Too broad.
10. Can you imagine the car running on top of the cat?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Clear question.
11. Can you think about anything rather ran?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Clear question.

12. Is it a complete sentence?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
13. Can you make complete sentences?	Expressive	Knowledge	Clear question.
14. Do you agree with her?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Clear question.
15. Why?	Comprehension check.	Comprehension	Clear question.
16. Could you mention the prepositions that you know?	Display	Knowledge	Too broad.

APPENDIX B5

Transcript 5

Questions	Linguistic	Cognitive	Comment
1. Anyway, who is going to read for us?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Exercises control.
2. Who has written this poem?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
3. He comes from which country?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
4. Where do we find South Africa?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
5. Where is Africa?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
6. Do we find South Africa in South?	Difficult to categorize	Difficult to categorize	Unclear what is wanted.
7. So, what is he talking about?	Display	Comprehension	Clear.
8. What is he talking about?	Display	Comprehension	Repeats the question.
9. What is it that you know in the poem?	Display	Knowledge	Unclear. Wants to contextualize the poem.
10. Anything you want to identify either as a witness or observer?	Display	Knowledge	Rephrased question but still not clear
11. Anything that you know?	Display	Knowledge	Repeats the question.
12. How can you explain that something is naked?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
13. You mean you don't know what it means to be naked?	Expressive	Knowledge	Repeats the question but in vain.

14. So, you are saying that the serf is naked, what does it mean?	Display	Knowledge	Repeats and rephrases the question.
15. Your face is without clothes now, is it naked?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Gives hint.
16. What about your hands, are they naked?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	To confirm understanding.
17. What else is familiar?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
18. What is the poem about?	Display		Clear question.
19. To whom does it refer?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
20. How can he be naked and yet we are told that his skin clothed him?	Rhetorical	Analysis	Answers his own question.
21. What is described about him?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.
22. What colour is the furrow?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
23. What makes you think the colour was red?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
24. Which word designates red?	Display	Knowledge	Do they know the meaning of designates?
25. Which word means red in the poem?	Display	Knowledge	Question rephrased.
26. Don't you know that?	Expressive	Knowledge	Clear question.
27. You only know royal blue?	Expressive	Knowledge	Irritated.
28. If something is rusty, what colour is that?	Display	Knowledge	Gives them a hint.

29. If something is rubric, what colour is that?	Display	Knowledge	Gives them a hint.
30. If something is crimson, what colour is that?	Display	Knowledge	Gives them a hint.
31. What is described about him?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his question.
32. Have you ever been insulted?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
33. Ntakha, can you join other students please?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Classroom management.
34. How did you feel?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Contextualizes the question.
35. So you mean whenever you are insulted you are angry?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Contextualizes the question.
36. There are times which you are not angry when you are insulted?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
37. When are you not angry when you are insulted?	Rhetorical	Difficult to categorize	Answers his own question.
38. Is there any insult which is not language?	Rhetorical	Difficult to categorize	Answers his own question.
39. What is the somnambulist?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
40. A sleep walker?	Confirmation check	Knowledge	Rephrases student's answer.
41. Can someone walk while asleep?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Clear question.

42. You mean you are lying down there so when you walk you just get up and walk while asleep?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Repeats the question for emphasis.
43. Are there such people in class who walk while asleep?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
44. Why is he referred to as a sleep walker?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
45. Anyway what is the serf?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
46. Are there some of you who are doing history?	Display	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
47. What are you doing?	Display	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
48. Who are doing history?	Display	Difficult to categorize	Ambiguous question - where?
49. Do you know what is a clod?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
50. Have you ever ploughed?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
51. Have you ever seen people ploughing?	Referential	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
52. What happens when you plough?	Referential	Comprehension	What happens to what? To the person, the machine (animals), the plough or to the soil.

53. Say, I am not looking how would you explain that one?	Display	Comprehension	Encourages students to speak.
54. What happens when someone ploughs or digs?	Display	Comprehension	Not clear - what happens to what?
55. Are there some clods or stones?	Display	Comprehension	Not clear - where or when doing what?
56. So how can you define clods or soil?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
57. What do you see as the red clod?	Display	Comprehension	Unclear - in the soil or in real life situation? Poor sequencing.
58. What is going to happen to the red clods?	Display	Comprehension	Ambiguous. No frame of reference,
59. What does the person see in the dryness?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
60. Where are the strides?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
61. How can clouds be brought down?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
62. What does it mean?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
63. How can someone topple clouds?	Display	Comprehension	Rephrases the question.

64. We know that clouds are in the sky and flowers are here for romance, growing in the soil, how come now they are united, flowers and clouds?	Referential	Analysis	Clear question.
65. How can clouds be toppled?	Display	Comprehension	Repeats question.
66. Do you know who was Bethuel in the Bible?	Display	Knowledge	Contextualizes the question.
67. But you do know that it came from the Bible?	Confirmation check	Difficult to categorize	Personal opinion.
68. Who can help us?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Clear question.
69. How can someone topple clouds at the same time growing flowers?	Display	Comprehension	Repeated and rephrased question.
70. Would there be water there?	Referential	Comprehension	Unclear question.
71. You know what are clouds, neh?	Expressive	Comprehension	Sounds like a tag.
72. Did you want to try?	Expressive	Difficult to categorize	Control.
73. What did you say about the waves when you were talking about clouds?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.

74. Have you ever seen a finished field having been ploughed?	Referential	Knowledge	Clear question.
75. Haven't you seen clouds like that?	Expressive	Knowledge	Unclear - which clouds? No frame of reference. Answers his question.
76. This slow progress, where does it take place?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Clear question. Answers his question.
77. Then what does this person see?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Answers his own question.
78. What does he see in the slow progress?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Answers his own question.
79. Where does this slow progress take place?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Answers his own question.
80. What causes this timeless patience, this progress?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.
81. What will the serf do with the timeless patience?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Answers his own question.
82. What else does the timeless patience do?	Rhetorical	Knowledge	Answers his own question.
83. What does that mean?	Display	Knowledge	Unclear - what does 'that' refer to?
84. What is meant by that?	Display	Comprehension	Repeats question.
85. How can you plough down palaces?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.
86. How can you plough down thrones?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.

87. How can you plough down towers?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.
88. Do you know what is a palace?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
89. Who lives in a palace?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
90. Have you seen a palace?	Referential	Knowledge	Clear question.
91. Where have you seen a palace?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
92. There is a place near St Catherines	Confirmation check	Comprehension	Wants to confirm understanding.
93. Where do we find it?	Display	Knowledge	Unclear.
94. Where in Lesotho?	Display	Knowledge	Contextualizes the question.
95. What would Basotho say about someone who works slowly but finishes his work?	Display	Knowledge	Contextualizes the question.
96. Is there any proverb that explains someone who works slowly but finishes his work?	Display	Knowledge	Rephrases the question.
97. Now looking at the poem, are there any questions?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Clear question.
98. Fatal, what does it mean?	Display	Comprehension	Redirects a student's question to the class.
99. Who can help us?	Expressive	Knowledge	Clear question.

100. If we say that someone died of fatal blow, what does it mean?	Display	Knowledge	Provides hint - guides students.
101. What if he died after a fatal blow?	Display	Knowledge	Rephrases the question to provide a contextual clue.
102. What is corn?	Display	Knowledge	Clear question.
103. You know corn bites?	Referential	Knowledge	Provides clues.
104. You know corn flakes?	Referential	Knowledge	Provides clues.
105. You mean you don't know what is corn?	Referential	Knowledge	Question repeated.
106. What are they made up of?	Display	Comprehension	Provides clues.
107. Any other questions?	Comprehension check	Comprehension	Confirm understanding.
108. How do we know that there was a lot of dust?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
109. How do we know that there was no rain?	Display	Comprehension	Clear question.
110. Does the poem tell us that there was no rain?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.
111. How do we know that he has been patient?	Rhetorical	Comprehension	Answers his own question.

APPENDIX C

Number of questions in each other 5 lessons

A Summary of Linguistic Analysis of all the Lessons Observed

Linguistic	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Comprehension checks	6	2	0	2	6	15
Confirmation checks	8	0	1	0	5	14
Classification requests	0	0	0	0	0	0
Referential	40	3	3	0	13	60
Display	21	12	0	12	59	104
Expressive	5	2	1	3	10	20
Rhetorical	1	0	0	0	17	18
Difficult to categorize	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total questions in each transcript	81	19	5	16	111	232

A Summary of Cognitive Analysis of all the Lessons Observed

Cognitive	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Knowledge	19	12	0	8	56	95
Comprehension	16	6	1	6	35	64
Application	2	0	0	0	0	2
Analysis	7	1	1	0	2	11
Synthesis	0	0	0	0	0	0
Evaluation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Difficult to categorize	37	0	3	2	18	60
Total questions in each transcript	81	19	5	16	111	232

APPENDIX D

The Serf

His naked skin clothed in the torrid mist
That puffs in smoke around the patient hooves,
The ploughman drives, a slow somnambulist,
And through the green his crimson furrow grooves.
His heart, more deeply than he wounds the plain,
Long by the rasping share of insult torn,
Red cold, to which the war-cry once was rain
And tribal spears the fatal sheaves of corn,
Lies fallow now. But as the turf divides
I see in the slow progress of his strides
Over the toppled clouds and falling flowers,
The timeless, surly patience of the serf
That moves the nearest to the naked earth
And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.

Roy Campbell (S. Africa) (in Rubadiri, 1989).

