

## **ACTIVITY BEGINNINGS AND ENDS: A CASE STUDY OF THREE TEACHERS<sup>(1)</sup>**

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In many EFL language classrooms, one of the teacher's most prominent roles is that of organizer. This job, consisting of setting the stage for activity and bringing it to a close, will be referred to as structuring. There would probably have been little to say about the teacher's role in structuring some fifteen or twenty years ago, when the teaching of English was strongly sequenced and units in many textbooks did not offer much variety in the types of activity (as can be gleaned from an analysis of such popular books in Europe as *First Things First* [1967] or *Mainline* [1973]). These features made classroom work quite cyclical and (because of the recurrence of activities) teachers did not need to go into great detail in presenting activities. However, the study of structuring in the contemporary language classroom makes sense for a number of reasons. First, the learning of a language today is generally regarded as a process of skill development and not simply the giving of rules or information. Under this concept of teaching to do, procedural structuring seems to be more relevant than if teachers were only involved in teaching to know. Secondly, there is now a trend to follow a more integrated model of curriculum development, whereby the sequence of activities in the classroom is not so predictable for students. Besides, textbooks generally present a wide variety of activity types. In addition, the rich supply of commercially available supplementary material makes it likely that teachers introduce a variety of types of activity. Furthermore, group work has progressively acquired prestige among teachers and is a feature of many classrooms today. The need to prepare students to work in groups before they are released seems to be more necessary than in activities that are teacher-led throughout. All the above stated reasons have motivated the present exploratory classroom-based study on the teacher as an organizer of activities with the expectation that what happens between activities, that is at their beginnings and ends, can be a fruitful a line of study.

Starting in the late sixties, there grew an important body of descriptive and process-product research on structuring from the field of general education based on the analysis system developed by Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith (1966) (see Doenau 1987 for a review). The descriptive studies identified a number of recurrent patterns where the structuring move occurred (e.g., proportion of moves, immediate context, participants), although the conclusions reached lose strength because of the little importance given to broader contextual features. The process-product studies mainly identified specific manifestations of structuring moves by effective teachers with the aim of relating these behaviors with learning (for a summary see Berliner and Rosenshine, 1987). Unlike the descriptive studies, these were concerned with the purpose of structuring moves but they had a markedly prescriptive orientation. The descriptive study of structuring with a concern for its pedagogical purpose would have to wait until the eighties.

A pioneer study from this more recent perspective comes from Gagné (1992), who classified the talk during structuring into three types depending on whether it is of a procedural, linguistic or psychological nature. During procedural structuring the teacher provides students with information on the purpose and direction of the lesson or activity. An example of procedural structuring would be a teacher starting an activity on commands by writing the words “draw, shade, darken, extend, shorten” in a column on the blackboard and then saying:

T Tonight, we’re going to draw a person dancing. As you draw, I’ll come around and tell you ways to change your drawings, using some of these words. (Fanselow, 1987, p. 442)

Procedural structuring typically occurs at the start of an activity, but when it is not fully explained, understood or paid full attention to, then instructions need to be added, repeated or clarified later during the activity. During linguistic structuring the teacher provides content-relevant information to assist students in reaching the goals established. An example would be a teacher bringing a pronunciation activity to a close by saying:

T Now that you have done this exercise, you see that an -ed after a voiced sound is pronounced /d/ and after a voiceless sound is pronounced /t/. (Fanselow, 1987, p. 443)

Finally, psychological structuring refers to the teacher’s verbal attempts to influence the students’ attention or predisposition towards the lesson or an activity. The following example comes from a teacher who is trying to give encouragement to students before she releases them to write a report.

T Now I’m looking forward to seeing what you write about wombats. (Christie, 1991, p. 209)

Given the scarcity of ESL/EFL literature on structuring, the remainder of this review will not be limited to this field but will also refer to work on the teaching of French, science, and general education.

A number of studies on structuring are devoted to the classification of the teacher’s talk. Gagné’s study (1992) offers the most extensive of such lists from an analysis of two teachers of French as a second language to teenagers. From a database of fourteen lessons she inductively identified four aspects of procedural structuring, and nine and eight of linguistic and psychological structuring respectively. Other authors have devised their own classifications but they have generally looked at only one aspect of structuring. Thus, Fanselow (1987) developed a list of procedural structuring in the context of ESL, Fox (1993) and Lloyd (1993) did so with linguistic structuring from the context of science and reading instruction respectively. Brophy, Rohrkemper, Rashid and Goldberger’s study (1983) presented an extensive list of psychological statements in the context of general education.

These categorizations have provided insight into how teachers generally deal with structuring. In addition, there is also valuable information on structuring from studies dealing with more general classroom-based issues (e.g., Bennet and Dunne, 1992; Doyle, 1986; Galton and Williamson, 1992; Nunan, 1996). As regards procedural structuring, we now know that it seems to predominate over both linguistic and psychological structuring

although it tends to be limited to explanations about what to do rather than providing information about curricular objectives or the management of learning. As to linguistic structuring, generally speaking teachers possess a significant repertoire of strategies, although they tend to use them with low frequency and without encouraging students to become cognitively involved. Regarding psychological structuring, teachers seem to include in their repertoire a number of negative statements (for example, saying to students that they are not expected to do well on the activity), under the assumptions that some students under some kind of psychological pressure might be more receptive to the activity at hand. Nevertheless, the total amount of psychological structuring as well as the proportion of negative and positive statements seems to depend on contextual variables, especially the students' age (for more information see Tragant, 1994).

A natural step to follow now that we have a good idea of how teachers generally open and close activities could be to investigate their teaching styles during structuring. Teachers' different approaches to the opening of lessons have been investigated by McGrath, Davies and Mulphin (1992) but there is no parallel study dealing with the openings of activities, a smaller unit of analysis. Nor is there any study that deals with activity or lesson wrap-ups, as important a boundary as the openings.

## **PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY**

The present study was conceived to find out if teaching styles could be observed in the structuring talk of three teachers and to describe and interpret their talk under an interpretative paradigm. The collection of data for the study started in October 1991 and ended in May 1992. The primary data of the study are observational and consist of field notes and audio recordings. During the first half of the year (from October to February) we visited each of the three classes from six to seven times and took notes during the observations. The purpose of those visits was twofold: (a) to collect data about the general style of the teachers, with a special emphasis on structuring and (b) to give some time for both the teachers and students to get used to our presence in class before going in with the recording equipment. The machine recordings started in March and continued until May. Each class was audio recorded on seven non-consecutive occasions, the first of which was a mock recording to accustom the teacher and students to the presence of the machinery in class. The purpose of these audio records was to be able to examine closely how teachers started and ended activities without the pressure of observation. The observations were completed with a semi-structured interview with each teacher, informal chats with them, a journal to record the history of the research and the collection of documents in the field.

Our analysis of the raw data followed an inductive approach starting with a period of scanning the field notes and the transcripts, to follow a time for intensive analyses of emerging themes and to finally find a general framework. Intensive analysis was done with the transcripts first and later on with the field notes, the interviews, and occasionally with a document in order to integrate all the relevant information. This type of data was mainly used to add categories, provide further illustrations, confirm or discard interpretations drawn from transcripts and draw relationships with the teachers' beliefs and attitudes. In the writing up of this investigation both description and interpretation of the data have been included.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The data collected for the present study come from three intermediate EFL classes at a language school at a major public University in Spain. Each class was taught by a different teacher, Bob, Mark and Sharon (pseudonyms), who were native speakers of English. Bob, in his late twenties, obtained a Postgraduate Certificate in Education specializing in ESL. 91-92 was his fourth year in the teaching profession and his third working at the university. Mark, in his forties, had received no formal training in ESL besides in-service seminars. He had been teaching English for nine years and it was four years since he first started working at the university. Sharon, in her mid-thirties, had obtained an RSA certificate while working at a private language school six years ago. Later, she herself started leading some of the in-service training seminars at that school. At the time of this study, she had been teaching English in Spain for nine years and it was also four years since she had started working at the university.

The majority of students attending Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's classes were undergraduates, even though in each class there was one graduate student and from one to three people who were not following a degree course at the university. This means that most of these language learners were young adults (19-24 years old). Mark's and Sharon's classes took place at the School of Physics and most of their students were pursuing a degree in this field or in chemistry (taught in the same building). Bob's class took place at the School of Economics and most of his students were pursuing that degree. All classes met four hours a week but Bob's and Sharon's classes met four days a week for an hour and Mark's class met twice a week for two hours each.

The data collected from Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's classes was from an intermediate 120-hour course. At that level, basic grammatical structures and communicative skills were consolidated and complex ones were introduced. All level three classes in the school were required to use the same textbook and students were also asked to purchase an exercise book, which was supplementary material prepared by the teachers at the school mainly serving the purpose of coaching students for the final exam. Apart from this unification as regards textbooks, there were few other restrictions.

## PREPARING THE DATA FOR ANALYSIS

Once the recorded lessons had been transcribed, we attempted to identify the major instructional parts in each lesson, the activities<sup>(2)</sup>. A further subdivision was identified below the activity, the stage. An activity was subdivided into stages if its performance was preceded by instructional content or followed by a correction or a public report. Four types of stage emerged from the lessons analyzed:

- presentation stage: the teacher mainly transmitted or provided information and students listened. Two types of content have been identified, one in which the teacher explained grammar and the other in which the teacher gave detailed instructions.
- performance stage: students were given time to prepare an activity individually or in groups before it was reported in public or corrected with the teacher.

- reporting stage: students presented what they had prepared in the performance stage to members of the class either in groups or to the whole class. The major focus was on the information that was being communicated.
- correction stage: students received feedback from the teacher on the activity carried out in the performance stage and/or reported in the reporting stage.

In some activities there was no subdivision into stages. Others had two or more of the above stages, usually in the same order they are presented here. Classroom interaction was divided first into activities and then into stages since structuring was expected to be found mostly at the boundaries between these two major constituents.

A third level of division is the segment, a term used to identify the times when the teacher structured activities at the beginnings and ends of lessons, activities and stages. The structuring provided to open one of these three units is referred to as a preparatory segment, regardless of whether it is a lesson, an activity or a stage that is opened. The preparatory segment covers from the first indicator that "new business" is about to begin (a pre-opening) until the activity begins (i.e., students start carrying it out). The structuring provided to bring one of the three units (lessons, activities or stages) to a close has been called wrap-up segment. This concluding segment covers from the first indication of a pre-closing until the eventual closing.

In preparing the data for analysis, the first differences among the teachers appeared in the number and type of activities and stages teachers implemented in their lessons. Bob's lessons consisted of few activities, one or two per one-hour lessons, and the same activity sometimes ran over to the next day. The activities were long partly because they usually consisted of more than one stage. Activities in Mark's class were shorter than in Bob's. Mark implemented an average of four activities in two-hour lessons. The most outstanding feature in Mark's class is the preeminence of one type of activity: language exercises. These were highly controlled exercises with a focus on form. Probably connected to the high number of language exercises is the fact that there were many correction stages. Sharon introduced a comparatively high number of activities in one-hour lessons (an average of four). In part, this pace was maintained because of the high number of one-stage activities. Activities would be brought to an end without thorough reporting or correction stages.

This brief macro-description of the three teachers' lessons provides a context for the subsequent analysis of structuring. The remainder of this paper presents the analysis and interpretation of the preparatory and wrap-up segments that occurred in Bob's, Mark's and Sharon's lessons, with special emphasis on identifying differences between them. For clarity's sake, each type of structuring (procedural, linguistic and psychological) is presented in a separate section. A fourth type, topic structuring, has been added to Gagné's (1992) classification.

## **PROCEDURAL STRUCTURING**

Teachers sometimes gave specific accounts about the actions students were expected to take with a detail or specificity that was not usually found in directions in which teachers

just gave the basic information about what needed to be done. Excerpt 1 is an example<sup>(5)</sup> of a specific direction from Mark in an activity where students had to interview each other. The teacher told them what they had to do if communication between the interviewer and interviewee broke down:

14. T            Now- you are now going to try and ask as many people as possible. (...) And also when you ask, remember don't please don't do this, don't say: Do you (like)- and show them the questions. Read them. If you don't understand: Could you repeat that? What does X mean? et cetera et cetera. OK (Mark, 1/4 848<sup>(5)</sup>)

Similarly, teachers sometimes explained a covert feature of the structure of the activity or of its evaluation (if it was an activity related to the final exam). These were sort of "tricks" that students would otherwise usually discover only after extended exposure to the activity in question.

[ACG1]As regards the use the three teachers made of procedural structuring, there are two aspects in which their behavior differed. One was their directions of how students were expected to interact with each other, and the other the use of the L2. The recurrence of these two issues in the procedural structuring of almost every activity as well as the sharp differences in behavior and attitude of Bob, Sharon and Mark justify devoting the remainder of this section to describing them.

Even though the three teachers used to put students into groups to carry almost all the activities, their emphasis on the importance of students working together was different. Sharon and Bob were more concerned with the quality of students' interactions than Mark was. This concern was evident during the teachers' interviews. Sharon was an enthusiast of cooperative learning and even said that she missed a measure of the ability to work with others in English in the final exams of the school:

2. If someone, even if their English is rubbish, if they've learned to work cooperatively with each other, I'd argue that although their language is not sufficient to pass their exam as such they would have benefited a lot in terms of education. . . . But that's not evaluated in any way. (Interview, p. 9)

In talking specifically about how he had adapted to the students in his class, Bob said that he was concentrating on group work as a result of a concern about students becoming more confident:

3. At the beginning I found that the only way of presenting material was very much teacher-led whereas now I'm concentrating more on fluency activities, with an emphasis on practice in small groups. (Interview, pp. 4-5)

So both Sharon and Bob were concerned with group dynamics, the former as a belief of hers and the latter out of an adaptation of his teaching to the students in the class. These concerns permeated in many ways during the lessons, including what the teacher said in the preparatory segments.

Comparing activities of a very similar nature (i.e., form-oriented activities<sup>(6)</sup>) across teachers, Sharon and Bob presented them in a subtly different way from Mark. Besides asking

students to go into groups, Sharon and Bob, mentioned that they were expected to work as a group not just in groups. These two teachers also expressed their interest in the interaction entailed in the carrying out of an activity. They encouraged discussion and exchange of ideas during group work. Here are some illustrations during the procedural structuring of several activities where the group orientation of these two teachers is made evident (see italics):

4. T Well, go into the group you want to go into, OK? But make sure you work as a group, all right? (Bob, 11/3 045)

5. T-G Have you got any vocabulary problems or no?

S Yes.

T All right. Then start looking at some vocabulary and guessing what it means. Yes? Yeah?

S Yeah.

T And discussing what you think it means. (Sharon, 11/3 448)

In contrast to Sharon and Bob, Mark limited himself to asking students to pair up and communicated an interest in the final stages of activities, rather than in the process of interaction students would engage in during group work. To put it simply, Mark seemed to be more interested in the answers, and Mark and Sharon in the process of finding them.

These two positions seem to be closely related to the attitudes the three teachers had towards the use of English in class. From day one, I immediately perceived a different treatment between the use of English in Sharon's and Bob's classes on the one hand, and in Mark's class on the other, as the very first page of our field notes reflects,

6. In comparison with Sharon and Bob there is no reinforcement or reminder here [in Mark's class] that they [students] need to speak in English. Some students even speak to Mark in Spanish. (Field note, 30/10 p. 1)

Five months later we were still impressed about the different use of English in the three classes, where students had theoretically the same level:

7. As the year progresses I see more and more of a difference between Mark's class, and Sharon's or Bob's. In Mark's class students use very little English, practically none to talk to each other and sometimes they even talk in Spanish in public. (Field note, 23/3 p. 50)

Sharon's and Bob's interest in students' interaction during group work matches these teachers' expectations that students should interact with each other in the L2 while on-task. Mark, in contrast, did not believe students were ready to interact in the L2 (field note, 4/11 p. 10). That belief would in part explain why he expressed no interest in group interaction. The comparison of two very similar situations taking place in both Bob's and Mark's classes gives a very good illustration of these two positions regarding the use of the L1 and L2. Bob's class was being introduced to a language exercise to prepare for the final exam and he pressed students to use English (they were working in pairs) arguing that there was little time left before the exam:

8. T            I think you are all doing it. I think you've got to remember that we've got the exam in about two or three weeks. Speak English. You need to speak in English every-day, yeah? (Bob, 18/5 037)

In contrast, Mark was also going to start an activity in preparation for the final exam and he specifically told students to use the L1 during the performance/planning stage, arguing that in the exam they would be allowed to plan that activity (a role-play) in the L1 (Mark, 13/5 443)<sup>(7)</sup>. Bob was trying to make the most of students' time in class to get them to speak as much English as possible, even though that was not a speaking activity (it was a language exercise). In contrast, Mark saw the activity solely as a preparation for the exam, even though his activity was primarily designed to speak (it was a role-play).

In short, there seemed to be a sharp difference between these teachers' concepts of what students could learn out of activities. Sharon and Mark's stress on group interaction in the L2 revealed that these teachers thought that all classroom activities had a potential for the development of oral skills, no matter whether they were primarily designed for that purpose or not<sup>(8)</sup>. On the other hand, for Mark the potential for learning of activities was compartmentalized. Speaking activities like discussions and role-plays were the only ones presented to students as opportunities to practice their oral skills. No oral practice was expected from activities that had not been primarily designed for that purpose. They were not the time to practice speaking.

## LINGUISTIC STRUCTURING

The term linguistic structuring refers to instruction on the study of language that is relevant to the whole activity and not just a part of it and that takes place within the preparatory and wrap-up segments. In the transcripts the teachers gave or elicited rules, examples or definitions in the areas of grammar, functions, vocabulary and pronunciation in order to optimize the benefit derived from the activity.

The following is an illustration from a preparatory segment where linguistic information was exchanged. It comes from the beginning of a series of exchanges where Sharon was eliciting two functions from students (giving advice and suggestions):

9. T            All right, OK . . . Advice. ((Writes on the bb for .08)) OK. If somebody comes to you and says, Oh I've got a terrible problem ((Acting out)). And you say, what different structures can you think of in English to give advice?

S            If I were you,

T            If I were you, ((Writing it))

((Revision continues)) (Sharon, 8/4 374)

After this event in excerpt 9, students were signaled to start the activity, that is, to do a role-play and practice giving advice and suggestions.

Figure 1 shows the amount of linguistic structuring per teacher. The pedagogical event is the unit used to describe each time a teacher provides linguistic structuring. If one consi-



ders the number of activities in the six audio-recorded lessons from each teacher, Bob included the highest proportion of events, followed by Mark. Sharon included events on linguistic structuring on very few occasions.

**FIGURE 1**

Number of events in linguistic structuring per teacher			
Teacher	Number of audio recorded events	Number of audio recorded activities	Average number of events per activity
Bob	13	9	1.4
Mark	18	25	0.72
Sharon	5	25	0.2

These differences in the handling of linguistic information were also evident in the interviews. Sharon stated that her teaching was geared to the development of fluency rather than accuracy on several occasions (field note 24/1 p. 46), which was reflected in the amount of linguistic structuring she provided. This is how she worded her view on grammar: "I can't myself survive happily in the class working entirely on the grammar structure. I see grammar as an appendix to language rather than language" (interview, p. 4). On the other hand, Bob, a teacher with a higher amount of linguistic structuring, was aware of the need his students had for that type of scaffolding: "It takes the class time to get going and I find myself giving quite a lot of examples of what is expected from a grammar exercise . . . . These examples have to be given to them before they feel confident enough to go ahead with that" (interview p. 1).

As regards the participation mode during linguistic structuring, Mark stood out from Sharon and Bob because his students participated much less. On the one hand, Sharon and Bob usually elicited the information from students and then built on it. They frequently interpolated questions in their structuring events. Sharon was quite articulate when she explained how she dealt with grammar and how she was bothered by students who did not participate:

10. I don't really like it explaining grammar as such. I like to sort of put things up on the board and get them to try to tell me what the rules are. (Interview, pp. 1-2)

On the other hand, Mark tended to give all the information to the students (often turning his back to them and just using the blackboard) without counting on their participation in the process of his explanations, as is illustrated in the following excerpt:

11. T            Now. If we look at the pictures we can see- ((Claps three times)). Listen. If we look at the pictures we can see that some things need doing. Some bricks need replacing for example. OK? Here we have- ((T starts writing on blackboard the explanation for the grammar of the structure they will have to practice in this

exercise. Once in a while he will say out loud what he writes but without looking at the students. He does this for 3.00)) (Mark, 23/3 356)

His events during linguistic structuring tended to be monologues, expositions without questions. Unlike Sharon and Bob, Mark did not usually include questions when explaining grammar either in the preparatory or in the wrap-up segments. Probably the fact that Mark often used the blackboard as the medium of communication for linguistic structuring contributed to the fact that this was so little interactive.

Mark seemed to bring prepared, “packaged” grammar explanations that he would deliver quite automatically without attempting to fit into a student’s specific question or mistake. For example, during the “question time” event of a grammar exercise, students were requested to give only the number of the sentence they had a question about (they were not told to ask a specific question). After each student had identified the problematic sentence, the teacher would come up with a general explanation, hoping that what the teacher explained matched the students’ taken-for-granted question (field note, 18/5 p. 53).

To summarize, the three teachers differed as to the amount of this structuring provided in their lessons, which seemed to be related to their views on the role of grammar in the classroom. In addition, one of the teachers stood out from the other two in the participation structure of these linguistic events .

## PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURING

At times teachers presented activities without any psychological structuring, that is, without including any pedagogical events intended to motivate students. At other times teachers did include some motivating pedagogical events, like in excerpt 12, where Bob presented a grammar exercise as challenging by telling students that the sentences they needed to complete were not easy. This is what he said towards the end of the preparatory segment after he had gone over the first sentence with the students<sup>(9)</sup>:

12. T Really easy, yeah? The others are not so easy, OK? ((Chuckling)) So what I want you to do in your groups now is decide, is it a gerund?, is it an infinitive? Then decide, can you make a rule about the use of the gerund or infinitive from those examples? (Bob, 11/5 040)

In the excerpt above, Bob’s motivating pedagogical event referred to an aspect of the activity (the grammar). Other motivating events dealt with other aspects of the language (e.g., with vocabulary being familiar), a specific instruction (e.g., a way of doing an activity being important), the type of activity (e.g., the importance of an assignment, the students’ familiarity with an activity) or the use of English in class (e.g., saying the teacher will be happy if students keep to English) and so on.

A total of forty-six motivating events from the three teachers were identified. They could be divided into two main groups. Those intended to give reassurance to students, to motivate them through positive thinking, will be referred to as reassuring events. Others intended to put pressure on students, to motivate them to be alert, will be referred to as pressuring events.

We will now turn to the individual use Bob, Mark and Sharon made of psychological structuring. Teachers' differing styles were most evident when they presented an activity that they viewed as potentially problematic. When faced with a difficulty, Sharon and Mark would accompany directions to overcome it with specific directions and with statements of reassurance. In this way, "obstacles" were neutralized or softened. For example, in introducing a reading activity where students would be told to get the general idea and to use two guessing strategies, Sharon told them:

13. T            There's a few problems with vocabulary, yeah? just a few. But don't worry about them. (Sharon, 5/3 395)

Note that even when Sharon mentioned the obstacle ("There's a few problems with vocabulary, yeah?"), she made use of downtoners ("a few problems . . . just a few"), thus making the obstacle look surmountable. This approach of Sharon and Mark seemed to aim at minimizing difficulty both at the level of procedure (through specific directions) and affect (through psychological structuring).

In contrast to Sharon's and Mark's "soothing" approaches, Bob's was different. He motivated students by magnifying problems and by having students see the need to follow his specific directions. Behind this approach there seemed to be a belief that students would work best or could be motivated when put under some pressure, like for example by showing them what could go wrong. This approach was evident in excerpt 14. The specific instructions in the preparatory segment of that excerpt consisted of asking students to anticipate questions and write notes in preparation for an oral presentation. In an attempt to make students see the need to follow these directions, the "stage" was set by introducing two motivating events. Bob first mentioned how important it was for students to back up their decisions with reasons (a reassuring event). Later, he went on to explain what could happen if the presentation was not good (a pressuring event). This last event he elaborated on again towards the end of his turn. In this excerpt, specific directions are indicated in bold type so that the reader notices the intertwining of this type of pedagogical event with psychological structuring.

14. T            Remember your plans, have a look at them, think about the rationale behind your plan. Mhm? I'd like you to think and why you put different people, or will put different people in different places, OK? Reasons are very important because when you come to the front and say: We will put this person here and this person here, . . . it's a good idea to justify that, to have a reason. If not the other people can ask you: Well, why will you put this person here and this person here? We should be thinking questions, OK? So I'd like you to spend five minutes preparing the justification for your plan, OK? Now you can make a list maybe of number one, two, three, four, five to help you while you are speaking because when you come out here in front of everybody, everybody looks very different and, and it's horrible and it makes you very nervous and you forget what you were going to say, OK? So it might be a good idea just to write down one or two things. OK? Five minutes eh? Let's go. Tick tock tick tock tick tock. Come on. Let's make this fast, eh? (Bob, 26/3 031)

This same tactic was used by Bob on several occasions consisting of offering pressuring arguments to encourage students to follow his specific directions.

These two approaches, that of Sharon and Mark on the one hand, and that of Bob on the other, are revealed in the unbalanced proportion of total number of reassuring versus pressuring events given by each teacher (see Figure 2). While Bob gave two reassuring versus eighteen pressuring events, Mark gave eleven reassuring versus seven pressuring events, and Sharon three reassuring versus five pressuring events. Even when considering the total number of psychological events per teacher, the differences between the three teachers remain. Bob and Mark provided psychological structuring with more frequency than Sharon. An average of 2.2 events per activity were identified from Bob, an average of 0.72 from Mark and an average of just 0.32 from Sharon.

**FIGURE 2**

Number of events giving reassurance versus those applying pressure

Teacher	Type of event		Total number of audio recorded events	Number of audio recorded activities	Average number of events per activity
	Reassuring events	Pressuring events			
Bob	2	18	20	9	2.2
Mark	11	7	18	25	0.72
Sharon	3	5	8	25	0.32

An explanatory factor for both Bob's pressuring manner as well as Sharon's scarcity of events seems to be related to how the two teachers perceived their class and to their beliefs about teaching. In the interviews there is evidence that Sharon and Bob had opposite perceptions of their classes. Sharon used the following adjectives to describe her students: "lively," "open," "experimental," "adventurous," "fun loving," "inquisitive." She said of them, "They are a good class. They are an easy class to teach. Relatively they are not passive" (interview, p. 16). All these features that she saw in her students and that she liked might explain why she made little use of psychological structuring.

In contrast, Bob described his students at the School of Economics as fairly passive and lacking confidence, especially in production activities, which were the activities where he communicated pressuring statements in his structuring talk:

15. Their expectations as to what their role is in class is that they should be fairly passive, that the class is teacher-led. This is OK when we do presentations and control practice but it is a problem when we do production activities such as brainstorming or free practice. (Interview, p. 1)

Bob also commented on the students' feeling inhibited about initiating turns in production activities:

16. They are young. Most of them are around nineteen and I'm not sure what their previous language learning experience was but they certainly don't seem to accept the idea that they can jump in that readily. (Interview, p. 2)

In brief, two ways of providing psychological structuring have been identified: a reassuring and a pressuring style, both with the aim of motivating students. These styles seem to reflect the teachers' perceptions of the students in each class.

## TOPIC STRUCTURING

During the preparatory and wrap-up segments the talk sometimes revolved around the topic of the activity. This talk is referred to as topic structuring in the present study and the pedagogical event will be the unit used to refer to each teacher's intervention. In the data four types of events in topic structuring were identified: (a) warm-ups, (b) suspense builders, (c) quick reports and (d) reactions. Warm-ups consisted of relating the topic of the activity to personal experiences, opinions or facts about the world. Through suspense builders, teachers intended to make students feel excited about how the activity at hand would evolve. Through quick reports teachers just selected a few students and asked them one or more questions about what they had talked about during the performance stage, instead of devoting a whole stage to making public what students had talked or written about. The fourth type of event in topic structuring, reactions, occurred when comments were made or elicited about the content of what students had said during a performance or reporting stage. Excerpt 17 is an example of a reaction where Sharon gave her opinion about what she had heard students say in an activity where students had to talk about themselves and their personalities:

17. T           OK. All right. Come back to me. All right. It was quite interesting looking to see how you see yourselves and how I see you. I mean, I know I don't know you very well, aha because I I know you but don't know you because I'm a teacher and you are students and bla bla bla. It's quite interesting to see what you think of yourselves. (Sharon, 7/4 403)

Having said this, Sharon concluded the wrap-up segment and went on to introduce the next activity.

The different use of topic structuring by each teacher will be the next subject of this section. Figure 3 shows that Sharon provided this type of structuring more frequently than Bob, while Mark made hardly any use of it. These differences may be partly attributable to the teaching styles of the three teachers. There were activities in Bob's and Mark's lessons that could have included these type of events (because of their similarity to Sharon's activities) but they did not. For example, one of Mark's lessons was on Marco Polo, a topic that could have led to the introduction of some contextual information. However, Mark never did a warm-up in that lesson, he presented the activity right away with no preamble. Another instance is found in an activity in Mark's 1/4, a very similar activity to one Sharon imple-

mented on the 7/4. Here students were asked to go over a list of words on personality and to focus on pronunciation. Mark started the preparatory segment by providing procedural structuring. Instead, Sharon first tried to relate an aspect of the topic to the students' personal knowledge ("who would you classify as talkative in the group here?") before she went on with the procedure for the activity.

**FIGURE 3**

Number of events in topic structuring per teacher and type

Teacher	Number of audio recorded events	Number of audio recorded activities	Average number of events per activity
Bob	2	9	0.22
Mark	2	25	0.08
Sharon	16	25	0.64

An index of Sharon's awareness of topic is found in wrap-up segments without a quick report, in which she justified its absence, as in excerpt 18 (see underlining). This was an activity where groups of students had been giving their opinions over controversial issues such as friendship, marriage and homosexual relationships and Sharon said:

18. T           OK (.02) All right, let's finish there, yeah? call it a day. All right? OK.

SS XX

T   I know, I'm not going to bring it to an end because it's also a personal discussion, it's going in different directions. I'm not going to bring it to an end, to a close. Take it as ended. (Sharon, 7/4 568)

In short, Sharon provided topic structuring more often than the other two teachers. The reason for this difference between teachers comes mainly from Sharon's teaching style and her concern for content.

## CONCLUSION

At first sight, it may appear that activity beginnings and ends were too large a unit of analysis, since smaller units like the move or the utterance are usually used to investigate classroom interaction. Taking this larger unit (i.e., the preparatory and wrap-up segment) entailed limitations and advantages. But while some ground in the depth of the analysis was definitely lost, this limitation was counteracted by the globality that was gained from taking the segment as a unit of analysis. The descriptions of how teachers introduced activities and brought them to a close could provide rich information about each teacher's style.

As regards the contributions of this study in terms of "findings," they can be grouped into two areas: First, differences in how the three teachers moved in and out of activities could be clearly depicted through frequency counts and a qualitative analysis of the classroom interaction<sup>(1)</sup>. Bob was a strong provider of linguistic and psychological structuring. Bob also stood out for his presentations of activities as challenging and he pressed on students the idea that groups were places for exploratory talk in the L2. The fact that he usually implemented one or a maximum of two activities per lesson resulted in each activity containing more structuring than any of the other two teachers' activities.

Sharon, on the other hand, was the teacher with the highest number of activities per lesson, an average of four. This meant fitting several activities in a lesson at the expense of longer preparatory and wrap-up segments with linguistic and psychological events. In spite of the quick pace of her structuring talk, this was participative, non-threatening and topic-oriented. And like Bob, she fostered group interaction. As to Mark, he provided linguistic and psychological structuring more frequently than Sharon and less frequently than Bob, and he rarely made use of topic structuring. However, Mark's most outstanding feature was that he seemed to underrate students' capabilities, something that permeated the preparatory and wrap-up segments. He did not usually require student participation during the linguistic structuring of the preparatory and wrap-up segments and he seemed to avoid dealing with students' grammar problems in an individualized way. In sharp contrast with Bob and Sharon, Mark also seemed to have little interest in making group work fully productive or in fostering the use of English.

A second contribution of the present study is that a number connections could be traced between some the three teachers' behavior in providing structuring and their set of beliefs about teaching. Bob's perceptions of his students and the type of psychological structuring that he provided for them is a case in point.

To conclude, the observation, study and discussion of preparatory and wrap-up segments in the foreign language class seem to be enough of a relevant topic to include in teacher training courses. The fact that the three teachers often led these two types of segments differently, both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking, supports this position. Also the fact that Mark, the teacher who had less training, was substantially different from the other two teachers further proves that training can have a positive effect on how teachers handle activity beginnings and ends. It is hoped that the present study will be useful for training purposes especially because we have developed various descriptive categories to describe structuring that may facilitate teachers analyzing and discussing aspects of their own activity beginnings and ends with a common language.

## NOTES

<sup>(1)</sup> I would like to Robin Rycroft for reviewing the paper. Special thanks too to the participants in the study, both teachers and students, for the openness with which they accepted us in their classrooms.

<sup>(2)</sup> The criteria followed to identify activities was pedagogical. Each lesson's major constituent, i.e. each activity, was defined as having a distinct pedagogical purpose.

<sup>(3)</sup> A list of symbols used in transcription may be found in Appendix A.

<sup>(4)</sup> Specific instructions and descriptions have been written in italics.

<sup>(5)</sup> After each excerpt there appears within brackets the date (day and month) the class was recorded followed by the number of the tape counter at the start of each excerpt.

<sup>(6)</sup> Form-oriented activities had an emphasis on vocabulary, grammar, functions or pronunciation. In these activities, how something was said is more important than what was said.

<sup>(7)</sup> In the speaking part of the final exam, students participate in a group role-play, which they have not seen before. The group of students doing a role-play together are led to a room to prepare the role-play before they do the role-play in front of the examiners.

<sup>(8)</sup> This emphasis on communication in the L2 at all times and places in class seems to have achieved the expected results in Sharon's class. By the end of the year she asked students what they had learnt and several students mentioned speaking as the skill in which they had made most progress: "Perhaps in vocabulary and to communicate with other people this class has been very interesting", "In COU you only learn structures, vocabulary and now with these structures and vocabulary you have to talk with other persons" (Field note, 13/5 p. 65).

<sup>(9)</sup> Pedagogical events in psychological structuring are written in italics.

<sup>(10)</sup> In reading the above descriptions of the teachers' styles during structuring, it must be kept in mind that the descriptions were a product of the relationship and interaction between each teacher and his or her students. This means that the structuring that Bob, Mark and Sharon were observed to provide must have been shaped to a certain extent by their students.

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#### Appendix A: Symbols used in transcription

##### \* Symbols to identify participants:

T	Teacher.
S	Student.
SS	Three or more students.
T-G	Teacher talking to a small group of students.
bb	blackboard

##### \* Symbols used in text:

(( ))	Non-verbal and paralinguistic information of the utterance that precedes the brackets.
(...)	A turn or part of it that has not been transcribed.
I don't- I can't express	An unfinished word or utterance, a self-editing marker.
/t/	Phonetic transcription.

##### \* Symbols for uncertain transcription and silence:

...	One second-pause.
(.05)	Seconds in pauses of more than one second. Used to indicate pauses within and in between utterances and turns.
XX	Incomprehensible phrase.
(from the)	Uncertain transcription.