TALKING GRAMMAR IN THE FORMAL ESL CLASSROOM: TEACHER TALK IN ONE GRAMMAR LESSON

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ABSTRACT

This paper deviates from current literature about teacher talk in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom in a number of significant ways. Specifically, it sets out to (i) identify the qualitative features of teacher talk in a grammar lesson and (ii) the type of student response(s) elicited. Moreover, the intention of the study is not to generalize the findings but to provide an in-depth observation of a naturally occurring phenomenon. Thus findings are drawn from an observation of one grammar lesson during the explanatory stage in a secondary ESL classroom in Brunei Darussalam. Results show the teacher's talk to exhibit certain features that can be summarized as being formal and abstract in execution and monologous in fashion. The results also show that these talk features seek to elicit particular types of student responses aimed at the correction of grammatical errors. Moreover, when looked at within the context of the literature on the topic, it is possible to rationalize the talk in this particular lesson and to position it in terms of effectiveness..

INTRODUCTION

Since Coulthard and Sinclair's (1975) pioneering probe into the IRF (Initiate-Response-Feedback) 3-part talk structure in the classroom, the topic of teacher talk has subsequently been expanded upon, revisited and examined quite thoroughly (e.g. Chaudron, 1988; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Martin, 1995; Castillo 1998; Cullen, 2002). In Brunei Darussalam, research studies on teacher talk have also been carried out. Various aspects of teacher talk were examined from code-switching (Martin, 1995) to the comprehensibility of teacher output (Chua-Wong, 1998) and the extent to which teacher talk allows for student negotiation for meaning (Chua-Wong & McLellan, 1996). Baetens-Beardsmore (1996) looked at student participation in response to teacher talk. In terms of classroom interaction, these studies show that generally students in the Bruneian classroom could be given more opportunities to use the target language in more spontaneous ways. The interest that teacher talk generates in classroom learning in general and in the English as a second language (henceforth ESL) classroom in particular is only to be expected given its significance in the formal learning context. While these studies have provided significant insights into the teacher/student verbal relationship in the ESL classroom, inquiry into teacher talk in formal ESL learning is far from being exhausted.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This paper deviates from the other studies carried out in a number of significant ways. In Brunei Darussalam, while the focus on teacher talk has mainly been in the primary

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classroom, this study looks at the phenomenon at the upper-secondary school level where the language classroom differs from the primary classroom in terms of learner age, language proficiency, and teaching and learning strategies.

Furthermore, while such studies are traditionally based on observations of a whole lesson, the focus in this paper examines the talk that goes on during the explanatory or presentation stage of the lesson. This again may be more appropriate at the secondary level where the introduction-explanation-conclusion stage sequence in a lesson becomes clearer and more distinct. Moreover, from personal experience as a secondary language teacher, a considerable amount of time has been found to be devoted to the explanation stage, whether it is talking about a grammar rule or writing a summary. This stage, in the writer's view, is a crucial part of classroom instruction, particularly at the secondary school level. In fact, teacher explanation has been listed as an integral part of classroom talk as early as the 1980s. Then, Bowers (1980) came up with a list of six categories of teacher talk after carrying out numerous classroom observations and analyses of lesson transcripts, of which presenting/explaining a particular language item during the lesson was one separate category of talk recorded. Indeed, the importance and dearth of research in this aspect of teacher talk is noted by Tsui (1995:30) as follows:

> Explanation takes up a very significant part of teacher talk and given that the role of the teacher is to make knowledge accessible to students, it is surprising how little research has been done on explanation.

Finally, while the studies carried out so far have tended to look at classroom teacher talk in general, this study attempts to examine the features of teacher talk as it occurs in one particular aspect of language learning, and that is the English grammar classroom. This is based on the assumption that parallel to current interest in English across the curriculum and genre-based studies, the type and degree of teacher talk in the classroom can also be linked to the topic under study in the classroom.

TEACHER TALK & GRAMMAR LEARNING

The oft repeated complaint among ESL teachers (and indeed from personal experience) is that despite all earnest efforts to teach students the grammar, they still fail generally to apply what they have learnt in their speech or writing or both. Teachers are resigned to the belief that grammar is just too difficult for L2 learners to grasp when the real question may lie in the area of grammar talk in the classroom. How do teachers talk about grammar in the grammar classroom?

Although studies on classroom teacher talk have been well-documented, those that provide for a focused look at non-native speaker teacher talk during the explanatory stage of a grammar lesson in ESL contexts may not be as common. Certainly, the suggestion in Richards' (2004) article on 'Communicative Language Teaching Today' is that teacher talk, regardless of whether it is about grammar or otherwise, should provide students with opportunities for both inductive as well as deductive learning of these components. Rogoff (1994) and Modiano (2000) both likened this to a dialogic teacher-pupil relationship in the learning process. Their argument is that classroom instructional talk has not brought about meaningful learning due to teacher dominance when it comes to the transmission of knowledge.

There is the belief among teachers that the most effective way to learn grammar is through traditional rote learning and grammar exercise drills (Lightbown, 1983; Ellis, 1984). Van Lier (1997) demonstrates the deeply entrenched practice of grammar drills and rote learning in the second language (L2) Spanish classrooms in Puno in Peru. However, from the viewpoint of functional linguists such as Halliday (1994), grammar is seen to be meaning-making and not just structural forms to be abstracted and learnt. As such, grammar has come to be seen not only as a set of rules but something potentially meaningful within the overall language learning process.

Long (1996) believes that when it comes to formal L2 classrooms, if language learning is to be semiotic or meaningful, there must be opportunities for students to be involved in the process of negotiation for meaning. In other words, teacher instruction should make allowance for student queries, requests for clarification and so forth. For this to happen, there must be the element of comprehensibility in teacher input. He goes on to say that if students are constantly struggling to understand the teacher's academic and abstracted language, then negotiation cannot occur.

Bourdieu, Passeron and St. Martin (1996) sum up teacher talk in the classroom in two words − distinct and correct. It is distinctly different from the language outside the school and is preoccupied with grammatical correctness. Modiano (2000) claims that teachers are often regarded, particularly in the ESL/EFL classroom, as models of standard and correct English for their students. As such, many teachers feel that their linguistic choice is taken out of their hands. Bourdieu (1991) claims that teacher talk is riddled with specialized and technical vocabularies far removed from the way the language is used outside the classroom. In Kramsch (1998), such talk is referred to as academia discourse, the formal language of the institution. A similar finding is recorded in Donato & Brooks (1994) in their studies of Spanish foreign language classrooms. Their argument, however, is that metatalk (abstract and academic) can help extend students' repertoire of the language when they are allowed to engage in metatalk either among themselves or with the teacher. Gass & Torres (2005) in their study of a grammar lesson among Spanish L2 learners found that input becomes intake when students are engaged in using the metalanguage among themselves. They found that when students were instructed on a highly complex Spanish grammar item, then put into groups to work interactively on a set exercise before being provided with the appropriate feedback by the teacher, many were able to grasp the item in a short time.

Teacher explanations are also found to be monologic (Brynes, 1998), where the teacher is seen to carry on in a monologue, often not aware of whether the student audience understands what is being said. This has resulted in claims that teacher talk is generally uninteresting and boring. In their study of the formal instruction of L2 Russian learners, Brecht & Robinson (1995) recorded how a student found the grammar lesson so boring he was not sure why he came to class at all. According to her experience with second language learners, Freed (1995) claims that the main criticism lies not with the grammar lesson itself but in the quality of the instruction. Ellis (1992), while confirming the need to have some form of grammar teaching in the L2 classroom, also admits that there is still some way to go with regard to finding the most effective way of presenting grammar to students in a way that helps them achieve proficient acquisition in the target language.

PURPOSE

This paper seeks to address the ESL teacher's talk during the topic presentation or explanation stage of a lesson in the secondary classroom. It has to be noted that here, teacher talk is essentially limited to the explanatory stage in a lesson. Particularly, it is content rather than procedural talk under Tsui's (1995) procedural/content distinction under teacher explanation, that intense twenty or thirty minutes in the lesson where the teacher explains the content of a particular topic.

In addition, this paper is based on the assumption that no two classrooms or even two lessons for that matter are alike. Thus, representativeness of results and findings is not the concern in this paper. There is no attempt made to generalize talk patterns, but what it does provide is a detailed observation of one naturally occurring phenomenon at work in one grammar lesson. With this in mind, the following questions are posed:

    (i)   What qualitative features of teacher talk can be identified during the explanatory stage in an English grammar lesson?

    (ii)   To what extent do they involve student oral participation during this stage of the lesson?

Qualitative features here refer to specific features of descriptive talk determined through an analysis of its linguistic patterns. Typically, they will be adjectival expressions such as formal, prescriptive, explicit and so forth.

METHOD

The study was conducted in an English medium secondary school in Brunei Darussalam. This was a class of forty-three 15-year old students of average to below average English proficiency. All are non-native speakers of English. However, at the time of the study, all had at least 10 years of classroom exposure to English as well as from media such as the television, radio and the Internet. The English teacher under discussion had about twenty-five years of teaching experience in ESL and was herself a non-native English speaker. At the time of the study, she had been teaching English in Brunei for nine years, mostly to students at the secondary and upper secondary levels.

With the consent of the parties involved, an observation was carried out in one English grammar lesson. This was a lesson on complex and abstract subject-verb agreement in English, an aspect of grammar which many ESL learners stumble over. Again with the consent of the parties involved, the lesson was taped using a field recorder and also a video camera. Moreover, notes were also taken during the observation to take account of non-verbal actions and responses.

It was thought that an appropriate analytical framework for the purpose of this study would be one based on the ethno-methodological approach. To some extent, the tools for analysis are influenced by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Widdowson, 1998) and conversation analysis (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1993; Zimmerman & Boden, 1993).

The analysis and findings are based mainly on the transcript of an audio and video recording of the lesson. The bulk of the data is extracted from the explanatory/presentation stage of the lesson, between turns 62 and 71 (see Appendix 1). They are then subjected to descriptive and interpretive textual analysis to find the significant talk features found at this stage in the lesson and the student response elicited.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The talk at the explanatory stage revolves around a review of the students' written responses to an exercise on subject-verb agreement in English done earlier. Students were supposed to fill in the blank in each sentence with the correct verb "to-be". Through textual analysis of the data collected, the talk features of the teacher can be described under five main categories. For the purpose of clarity, each category can be further divided using the dichotomous distinctions shown in Table 1. For the purpose of coherence in the discussion of the findings, a brief explanation about the categories and subcategories is given.

Table 1 **An analysis of the characteristics of teacher oral instruction during the explanatory stage of an English grammar lesson**

Teacher instruction	Type		Structure		Conception		Function		Prospect	
	Pres	Des	Exp	Imp	Abs	Con	Corr	Promp	Mono	Dia
Characteristics	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−

Key: Pres Prescriptive   Abs Abstract   Mono monologic
       Des Descriptive   Con Concrete   Dia Dialogic
       Exp Explicit   Corr Corrective   + positive
       Imp Implicit   Promp Prompt   − negative

"Type" is expressed in terms of the Prescriptive/Descriptive distinction − whether the teacher tells the students how the particular grammar point should be used (Prescriptive), or whether she encourages students to describe the ways in which it could be used (Descriptive). "Structure" refers to the presentation of the subject-verb agreement, whether the item is being addressed directly and authoritatively (Explicit) or suggested indirectly through other methods such as group discussions or activities (Implicit). "Conception" refers to how the instruction is being conceived. Two contrasting levels of Conception are considered here, the Abstract level, where the teacher talks about the grammar technically without examples or a contextual base, as opposed to the Concrete level, where efforts are seen being made to enable students to see or work out the use of the grammar point through activities and tasks. "Function" refers to the purpose of the instruction as defined in Wells (1999), whether the teacher's intention is merely to correct student errors (Corrective) or to encourage them to participate in the correction process (Prompt). The final category, "Prospect", also adapted from Wells' (1999) framework of classroom interaction, refers to the potential of the instruction in generating talk or expanding talk in the classroom. Here, instruction is deemed to be either a lengthy one-sided lecture by the teacher (Monologic) or on-going discussions involving both teacher and students (Dialogic) in the sense described in Modiano (2000). Each subcategory is marked with a + sign to show a present and therefore positive characteristic or a − sign to show an absent and therefore negative characteristic.

From Table 1, the teacher's instruction is seen to be of the prescriptive type. The

following are examples that show this to be true:

Example 1   …subject is very important for you to understand. otherwise <u>you will</u> always go wrong here

Example 2   …the verb <u>must</u> agree with the subject

Example 3   …then <u>you have to</u> go along by the sense (of the sentence)

Example 4   …<u>understand</u> another rule. when you have "either" and "or" as the subject in a sentence, when you have alternatives, use "either" and "or", the verb is always singular.

The frequent use of the modals 'will', 'have to' and 'must' with the pronoun 'you' and the use of the imperative 'understand' all show the teacher prescribing the rule to the students when it comes to the subject-verb agreement in a sentence: 'you will'…'you have to'. These are almost always followed by the conveyance of a rule pertaining to the use of the subject-verb agreement. Moreover, the teacher was observed to deliver the rules in a formal manner with the students assuming a listening attitude. The teacher does not attempt to involve the students in sharing in the talk at this stage of the lesson. The students on the other hand appear to accept what is being said without question. The field notes show no evidence of student questions or requests for clarification during this stage of the lesson.

The structure of the explanation is seen to be explicit, in the sense that the specific grammar terms pertaining to the topic are presented directly:

…but the main subject in the sentence is 'the teacher'. it is not 'the students'

…when you have alternatives, use 'either' and 'or', the verb is always singular

Terms like 'subject' and 'verb' are used directly as they are with no attempts at modification or elaboration. The teacher does not appear to be very concerned about student response, or whether they respond at all. Quite clearly, her intention is to convey the relevant facts and information about subject and verb agreement in English. Students are assumed to have understood what is being conveyed since there are no interruptions at any point during the explanation.

Talk is also found to be at an abstract level, evident in the frequent use of technical or specialised expressions: 'nouns', 'verb' and so forth. It is noted that in turn 66 alone, there are twenty-two instances of such expressions. Furthermore, these are embedded in a distinct metatalk that is seen to be compact and economical:

Example 1   …when you have alternatives 'either' and 'or', the verb is always singular

Example 2   …then the exception to this rule will be the verb which is…

Example 3   …the number of the noun that is closest to the verb has to be taken into consideration…

The teacher sets the rule for using singular verbs in sentences and some of the exceptions to this rule. There is a considerable number of instances of metalinguistic use in the teacher's talk. Phrases and expressions such as 'verb', 'noun', 'singular', 'exception to this rule', 'taken into consideration' are all formal and highly abstract terms. Moreover,

there is little evidence of input modification or elaboration of specialized expressions used. Metatalk is observed to be within the exclusive domain of the teacher. Students are not engaged in discussing or negotiating the meanings of 'verb' or 'noun', for example, among themselves or with the teacher. Because the students are mostly listening quietly, it is difficult to gauge if input has resulted in intake.

The "Function" of the talk is a systematic correction of students' answers to a grammar exercise. An interpretive analysis of the correction of errors shows a systematic pattern of *reading→ rule→ correction→ reinstatement of rule* sequence, a pattern with a r-r-c-r (reading-rule-correction-rule) sequence.

…the third sentence (reads from the board)..	[reading]
…again, understand another rule. when you have alternatives … the verb is always singular…	[rule]
…so 'have' here is wrong. So either John or Jack 'has' done this…	[correction]
…then the exception to this rule will be the verb which is… the number of the noun that is closest to the verb has to be taken into consideration	[rule]

The teacher selects a sentence with an incorrect use of the verb 'have' and proceeds to explain why it is incorrect. Specifically, she reads the sentence, gives an appropriate rule, corrects the error before concluding with a restatement of the rule. Student participation during the correction of error is not solicited at this stage.

In terms of "Prospect", teacher talk is observed to be in the form of lengthy chunks of information carried on in a monologue. There is no evidence of student interruption in between the instruction. The following data extract is taken from turn 62, which reflects the interactive pattern of the talk during this stage of the lesson. It shows the teacher telling the students that there are rules and regulations in the use of the English subject-verb agreement. She goes on to look at the correct verb for a sentence with 'either' or 'neither'.

1	T:	a --->	Now, there are certain rules and regulations and principles that you have to follow for this particular topic
2		b --->	Try to write the correct verb for the subject, understand?
3		c --->	There are some rules, exceptions, to the rules
4			We say 'either' and 'neither' must take a singular verb
5		d --->	What is a singular verb?
6			Look, we take 'are' [writes the word on the board]
7		e →	The singular verb for 'are' would be…?
8	SS:		is

Key:

T	teacher	--->	pseudo-transitory term
SS	students	→	genuine transitory turn
…	pause		

The arrows (pseudo and genuine) indicate moments where, in the talk, there could be a possible turn transition point. In other words, these are points which present opportunities for students to have a turn in the talk. The broken arrows refer to false or pseudo transitory turns in the sense that, although they present superficially a point for transition, they are not. The unbroken arrows represent genuine transitory turns where an actual transition turn occurs. From the extract presented above, arrows 'a' through to 'd' all show points of pseudo-transitory turns. Although each point indicates the possibility of turn transition, it is not converted into an actual turn transition. What is further noticed is that there is no pause just before each pseudo transitory turn to allow for a change in turn taking. Thus, although the possibility for a turn transition is evident at the linguistic level through direct questions such as "Understand?" (b) and "What is a singular verb?" (d), this does not match with the intention of the teacher to relinquish her turn just yet. She does this by not pausing to allow for a turn transition. It is not until the last transitory turn (e) that a genuine possibility for a turn transition occurs. This is sanctioned through a noticeable pause after the teacher's elicitation question: "The singular verb for 'are' would be…?" (e). The question is followed by the students' response of 'is'.

With regards to the kind(s) of student response the teacher's talk elicited, an analysis of their responses found that there are altogether three types. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. **An analysis of the type of student response during the instruction stage of the lesson**

Turn Number	Type of Student Response				
	Monosyllabic (Individual)	Monosyllabic (Choral)	Spontaneous (Individual)	Spontaneous (Choral)	Silence
63					
65		is			
67		is			
69		yes			[silence]
71					[silence]

They have been classified as: Monosyllabic or one-word response; Spontaneous, which refers to a complex and longer response; and Silence or no response. Each type is further divided into either the Individual or Choral category. From the table, three out of the five student turns are one-word monosyllabic responses answered in a chorus: 'is', 'is', 'yes', while the remaining two responses are silence. The responses are all short answers provided to accurately fill in the blanks in the grammar exercise provided. During the interview with the teacher after the lesson, she said that she was quite happy with how the lesson went as the intention was to get students to respond correctly to the exercise on the board.

Going back to the first question posed at the beginning of this paper and from the above analyses, teacher talk at the explanatory stage in this grammar lesson is shown to

exhibit a number of qualitative features. It was formal in the sense written about in Kramsch (1998) where such talk is referred to as the distinct academic language of the institution. Certainly, it is quite different from the language encountered outside the classroom and school. There are none of the hesitations, hedgings or incomplete utterances found in informal speech. The talk was carefully monitored and grammatically accurate, a reminder of Bourdieu, Passeron and St. Martin's (1996) claim that, in general, talk in the classroom is preoccupied with grammatical correctness.

The high degree of formal talk was perhaps highlighted through the considerable amount of metatalk incorporated within it, particularly in the explanation of the rules of the subject-verb agreement. Metatalk in formal second and foreign language learning may not be that unusual in classroom learning (Bourdieu, 1991). However, the talk in this study differed from that found in other classroom studies in that, while students in these studies were engaged in using metatalk among themselves (Donato & Brooks, 1994; Gass & Torres, 2005), here it was found to be exclusively in the teacher's domain. It is the teacher using specialized terms to explain and prescribe the rules of the subject-verb agreement. The students adopted a receptive rather than productive attitude throughout the explanatory stage.

The preoccupation with formal language, the high incidence of abstract talk and the lack of teacher input modification may have led to the noticeable student reticence observed. As a result, there was very little opportunity for students to be involved in negotiating for meaning in the sense advocated in Long (1996). The students showed their uncertainty when asked to do a written exercise just before the end of the lesson. This supports Long's (1996) argument that negotiation cannot occur if students are constantly struggling to understand the teacher's academic and abstract language. In addition, the teacher appeared to be more interested in getting the structure across. There was less interest in engaging students into making meaning out of the structure of the grammar item. This might explain the complaint about students being able to perform in objective grammar exercises and yet failing to use what they have learnt contextually in their writing and speaking. Thus, it might be worthwhile to ponder on Halliday's (1994) claim that grammar must be seen to be meaning-making in addition to a mastery of structural forms. Although it is supposed to be an interactive speech event between two parties (the teacher and students), the teacher was the active participant throughout this stage in the lesson, which confirms the conclusion drawn in Brynes (1998) and Brecht & Robinson (1995) about teacher talk being monologous and monotonous. While it is quite natural for teachers to get carried away with delivering as much information as possible in the short time allocated, it may be more difficult to find out if input has resulted in successful intake if a dialogic teacher-pupil channel of communication is not present (Rogoff, 1994; Modiano, 2000). Moreover, getting students involved in grammar talk could help them see the meaning of the grammar lesson within the overall learning of the language (Freed, 1995).

In terms of the kind of student response elicited, the first observation noted is that more often than not, the response was in the form of a drill similar to grammar learning found elsewhere (Lightbown, 1983; Ellis, 1984). Although there were no grammar drills and rote learning of the kinds recorded in van Lier (1997), student responses were in a sense monosyllabic drills in response to the occasional closed questions asked by the teacher. They were one-word answers called out to slot in the blanks in the set of grammar items presented.

More often than not, inductive rather than deductive student responses are offered. Students were expected to use what has been provided in the talk to fill in the blanks

correctly. They are not required to use what they heard to apply to situations beyond the immediate task. In a sense, there were no opportunities for both inductive and deductive learning of the grammar item as advocated by Richards (2004) in his article on improving communicative competence in formal ESL learning. As a result, student response was seen to be typically short and focused on the immediate task rather than complex and lengthy as in problem solving and discussion.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a study of teacher talk that deviates to some extent in focus from those found in current classroom studies in some important ways. In particular, it looks at qualitative features of teacher talk during the explanatory stage in a grammar lesson in an upper-secondary ESL classroom and the types of student response(s) elicited. Based on the results and discussion, teacher talk in this instance is shown to present a number of features – formal in code, abstract in language and monologous in fashion. One type of student response as a result was the monosyllabic answer drill designed to fill in correct responses to a set of grammar items. Moreover, inductive rather than deductive responses were elicited where students were required to reproduce what they heard to perform a set of grammar exercises. This has been a small scale study based on one stage in one grammar lesson and so may not be representative of teacher talk across all language classrooms. The intention from the beginning, however, has not been about generalizing the findings. It is more about observing one small instance of talk in its natural context and then reflecting upon it afterwards within the framework of the relevant literature, seeing whether it makes sense and whether it has potential for improvement in terms of teacher talk in the grammar classroom.

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Appendix 1

Transcript of grammar lesson during the instruction stage

62   T   all of you agree on that? all of you agree with what I'm saying? Yes? this is because you repeat this mistake in your composition, your written work, alright? J, sit straight [this to a boy in front]. when we say Jack and Jill is the subject, repeating that I said earlier, the subject agrees with the verb. now you all agree that all these that I have filled in the blanks are verbs, alright? the verbs shows action. the most important topic next to the tenses in English grammar is this, alright? here, now there are certain rules and regulations and principles that you have to follow for this particular topic. when you try to write the correct verb for this subject, understand? there are some rules, exceptions, to the rules. we say 'either' and 'neither' must take a singular verb. what is a singular verb? look, we take 'are' [writes the word on the board]. the singular verb for 'are' would be…?

63   LL   is

64   T   is [write it on the board] isn't it? according to that definition, the first sentence you'll see that. . when you have two … see it goes back to all the basics. what I taught you. two nouns 'Jack and Jill'. proper nouns are connected together with the conjunction 'and'. it will always take the verb 'are'. this is the first basic rule of agreement verb with subject. all of you following what I'm saying? Y? comes to the second sentence now [reads sentence from the board] the teacher with her students are in the class. subject in the sentence is 'the teacher'. rule for agreement of verb with subject is when one noun 'teacher' is 'are' is definitely wrong here. 'teacher' is the main subject so what will you put here?

65   LL   is

66   T   is. alright. Another noun which is in plural connected with a 'with', not necessary 'with' but the main subject in the sentence is the teacher. it is not her students. the verb that you supply here has to agree with the subject. 'the teacher'. M, you said yes, right? understand carefully. if you have a doubt, please ask me. I said subject is very important for you to understand. otherwise you will always go wrong here. the verb must agree with the subject. the main subject here is 'the teacher', not the students. so 'teacher' has to be highlighted and the verb has to be supplied accordingly. students has to take into consideration, for this type of sentence…understand, it is very important. the rule does not only say 'with', and then you have to go by the sense of the sentence. I'll tell you later, the third sentence [reads from the board] 'either John or Jack [stops to indicate a blank] done this'. again, understand another rule. when you have 'either' and 'or' as the subject in a sentence, when you have alternatives, use 'either' and 'or', the verb is always singular. so 'have' here is wrong. so either John or Jack has done this. then the exception to this rule will be the verb which is the noun, the number of the noun that is closest to the verb has to be taken into consideration. don't think that it's something very technical and difficult I'm speaking, very simple this is. if I say 'either John or the rest of the boys…" understand? 'either John or the rest of the boys blank done this'. so the noun close to the verb is 'boys'. so naturally the verb varies. so the verb varies according to the noun which is closest to it. when you use, you use your own discretion. so it is not hard and fast obviously. the rules. you have to use your own discretion. when you come to

such tricky sentences, and remember why I am doing it to detail, because your compositions you make one mistake like this and half a mark is deducted. I'm not doing this for the sake of doing it, alright? and ask me if you have any doubts. come to the fourth sentence now. are you all with me? are you all understanding?

67   LL   yes

68   T   [reads the next sentence on the board] 'none of the boys in the class is a culprit'. again, when we say agreement, we say 'either', 'none' we take a singular verb. 'none of the boys', 'none' is the subject. according to the rule, 'none' as a subject takes a singular verb. if I was to say 'none of them are to be blamed', then the verb varies. why? because the number 'them' is plural. simple. then we come to the final one, the fifth one. this is not all. these are some very important, basic rules. [reads the final sentence on the board] 'the committee blank agreed on the proposal'. what is committee? we know'committee' is the subject. what else can you highlight on 'committee'? what is committee? more than one. what have you learnt?

69   LL   [silence]

70   T   collective noun! yes or no? you've forgotten. another major rule you have to follow in agreement verb with subject. you have collective nouns. the usage of the verb varies along with the sense of the sentence. five, six, ten persons. it varies. more than three will make a committee. so 'committee has agreed on the proposal'. now who had said the sentence was wrong? I don't remember, yah. this is correct [marks the sentence on the board] o.k. now here, you have an exception to the rule. here you're taking the committee as a whole, as a group. but when the sentence makes a discrimination…the… now here 'the committee has agreed on the proposal'. were I to put it in another way, all various factors [changes the sentence on the board] 'the members of the committee were upset', then I will use a plural verb, alright? a collective noun, a committee, a bouquet of flowers, always will take a singular verb. anyone has any doubt?

71   LL   [silence]