

# The LLL SIG Newsletter

**Organizing and classifying speech, gestures, pictures and other mediums, the content they communicate and ways we use them—Analyzing rather than judging or evaluating what we do**

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## **Comparing service industry companies and educational organizations**

When I call my credit card company, I here this message, “This call may be recorded. We’re taking a fresh look at everything we do to serve you better.” I think it is scandalous that while banks and credit card companies and other service industries record conversations between clients and those who serve them, we teachers do not. And with all due respect to the various service industries, teaching is more complex to understand than a conversation between two people! We who teach have from 5 to 40 clients in a class, not just one client, as in a phone call with an agent from a service company.

The fact that so many large companies think it is important to analyze what one employee and one customer say to each other and yet not one school district or one provincial or prefectural board of education in the world follows this practice is outrageous.

In 2012, the state of Florida spent 43 million dollars to develop a new observation system to evaluate teachers. What a waste of money! There are already more than 200 observation systems that have been used for decades that could be used.

Also, using observation systems to evaluate teachers can be a detrimental because evaluations can lead to a kind of stultification, to a lack of exploring and experimenting. When a teacher sees an item on an evaluation sheet that says “Teacher made goal clear.” The teacher is not likely to ask students what they think the goal was during the lesson. Observation systems that are prescriptive are likely to decrease teachers’ use of alternatives. And almost all evaluation instruments are prescriptive.

Though many think that that evaluating teachers can lead to better teaching, there is little evidence that this is the case. If teachers feel that trying alternatives might lead to negative evaluations they are unlikely to try them.

While some service industries evaluate what employees say and fire those who do not conform, many service companies are interested in understanding how to improve, not to evaluate and fire employees. “We’re taking a fresh look at everything we do to serve you better.” In our world of teaching, I would say that we want to take a fresh and detailed look to understand what we and our students are doing. As we look at recordings of what they are doing and transcribe 1 to 3 minute segments, we can see the level and sophistication of their language, their misunderstandings and errors and their development. When we have our students transcribe they too can see what they are saying and doing in class. And we can see what words they miss as they transcribe and what words they misunderstand.

This is not to say that teachers have no responsibility for the results of what they do. But I believe that if teachers themselves analyze the results of alternative activities on their own or with colleagues and of course with their students the evaluation of the results of their teaching will be more useful.

Rather than having supervisors evaluate teachers with checklists and prescriptions, I think teachers will grow more if they are asked to illustrate how what they are doing is what they want to be doing and think they are doing. They also need to be asked to what extent the activities they have students do are in tune with assumptions they have about learning or that the school or language institute has.

When a school claims it believes students learn from pair work and a teacher at the school never does pair work the teacher has to be shown ways to do pair work. If the teacher refuses to do pair work then the school cannot continue to employ the teacher.

If parents send their children to a school to ensure they learn to read and a teacher spends each class doing only oral work, the

teacher has to be made aware of the discrepancy. If the teacher does not devote more time to reading, the teacher has to be asked to seek employment at a place that focuses on oral work.

Evaluating teachers on the basis of test scores I believe is an abhorrent practice. Why? Well, for one thing scores on all standardized tests vary by 10 to 20 points—the standard error of the mean. For another thing, some students have tutors and attend extra classes outside of class while others do not. So if students in some classes have extra classes and others do not, what does this have to do with what their teacher does?

Also, many tests fail to show how students actually use language and other mediums. I have seen students reading silently and tapping with their fingers on their desk each time they finish a sense or breath group or chunk of language that means something to them. No standardized test or teacher test can detect this crucial skill.

When students write during a dictation some erase what they wrote incorrectly. But if we ask students to just edit what they write and not erase it we can see their errors and what they need to practice more. No tests can detect these spontaneous errors.

There are a lot of books on teacher reflections. Some of the authors of these books suggest writing diaries, memories of how they and their students felt. In some chapters in these books, they suggest teachers record their lessons. But as you know, very few teachers do. Lack of time, fear of being judged negatively, and ignorance of observation skills are a few of the reasons that recording and transcribing what we do is so rare.

### **Analyzing versus prescribing and judging**

To deal with the fear of being judged negatively and having to follow prescriptions that others make that we think are wrong, as well as the ignorance of how to analyze what we do, I, like many before me, have developed ways to describe what we and our students do.

Observation systems allow us to classify features of what we do just as botanists classify characteristics of plants. While a botanist might like the look of roses more than dandelions and prefer the sweet scent of daphne to the pungent odor of garlic, the botanist's task is to analyze plants not judge them.

Service industries analyzing telephone calls have it easy because, besides that only two people are just talking, all they have to analyze is spoken language. Though audio recordings enable us to notice emotions—anger, sincerity, humor—as well as facts—“Your check was for \$2,000.00, not \$1,900.00.”—they cannot reveal gestures, facial expressions, and many other ways that we communicate meaning.

When we look at a video clip of a class or a movie, we realize that there are many mediums—sorry for the jargon—ways we communicate other than through speech and tone of voice. In addition to all of the physical movements, gestures, and facial expressions, there are also all of the things we look at and touch or are touched by.

Here are some categories of ways we communicate when we teach and ways textbooks we use communicate to us. If we transcribe what we hear from a few minutes of a video clip and then watch it a few more times for other things, we can write mediums that we and our students use and how they are used next to the words we transcribed.

When we cannot regularly video our classes, we can still note the mediums used in the textbook and student notebooks and on slides, and on the board if we take digital photographs.

As long as we consider our task to be to try to match words, pictures, colors, graphs, gestures, etc., that we hear and see with the categories below, we will not need to make judgments. Botanists might like the shape of some flowers and leaves better than others, but as I just said, their task is to compare and contrast characteristics of various plants not to make judgments about them. We should do the same.

## **Linguistic**

**LA** Linguistic Aural--Appealing to the ears: when understood or attempting to understand, spoken words and sentences, tone of voice, exclamations such as Aha! Huh?, the letters of Morse Code

**LV** Linguistic Visual--Appealing to the eyes: when understood or attempting to understand, printed words and sentences, punctuation, upper and lower case letters in cursive or print, ideograms, touch typed letters, sign language for the Deaf, mouthing of words

**LO** Linguistic Other--Appealing to other parts of our body: when understood or attempting to understand, Braille, mouthing of words, letters made with sandpaper, or whatever, that we can feel the shape of without seeing them, phonetic script

## **Non-linguistic**

**NA** Non linguistic Aural--Appealing to the ears: music, animal sounds, ringing bells, rustling leaves, clapping, footsteps, whistling, humming

**NV** Non linguistic Visual--Appealing to the eyes: pictures, sketches, diagrams, jewelry, color, furniture, clothes, cartoons, puppets, movies without sound, maps, underscoring, icons, blank spaces (other than between words), symbols (other than punctuation), arrangements of chairs in classes, lights, flooring, plants, animals, fish

**NO** Non-linguistic Other--Appealing to other parts of our body: odors, temperature, and tastes

## **Para linguistic**

**PA** Para linguistic Aural--Appealing to the ears: grunting, laughing, crying, tone of voice

**PV** Para linguistic Visual--Appealing to the eyes: gestures, facial expressions, skin color

**PO** Para linguistic other--Appealing to other parts of our body: touch, movement, dance, posture

### Other

**N** Noise—anything that interferes with any of the mediums—static, low volume, pictures that are out of focus, etc.

**S** Silence, wait time, time devoted to doing an activity with no action taking place that can be seen or heard or felt

As you have just seen, I have grouped Morse code as both LA and LO and sign language as LV and LO and whistling, humming and music as both NA and PA. The grouping of mediums is complex. But discussing whether whistling is a non linguistic rather than a paralinguistic medium distracts us from making judgments about the value of whistling.

The crucial question is not which category mediums fit into but rather how often you or your students whistle, mouth words, make letters of the alphabet with your fingers, etc., what the purpose of the whistling and other mediums is, how they are used and what content they are communicating. The categories are just a means to highlight the importance of the wide range of mediums we use other than spoken and written language.

The *Non-linguistic visual* medium *color* might seem trivial. But in many dictionaries, the one or two thousand most frequent words are printed in red. Few students realize this fact. In many textbooks, colors are used to distinguish different parts of speech. As we look at how colors are used to highlight frequency of words or parts of speech, it is difficult to make judgments about how good or bad our teaching is.

*Odor*, which I group as a *non-linguistic other medium*—NO—might seem even more trivial than color. But when I have asked students to name some things they dislike about a class, many say they dislike the cologne their teacher uses. Such a comment can of course be considered a judgment, which identifying mediums is supposed to avoid.

But it is not a judgment by us or by someone in a position of control over us. And, to the extent that such comments reveal something about our teaching that we had been unaware of, they can be seen as contributing to the analysis of what we do and the consequences of what we do.

Earrings, another *non-linguistic medium*—NV, were very distracting to some students, also. In some countries, whether women wear something on their heads—NV—leads to riots. In some New York City schools, males who wear baseball caps in school are told to remove them because they show disrespect. Some of the same boys when they go to Temple on Fridays have to wear a yarmulke—skullcap-- to show respect.

One of the reasons we use many mediums to communicate is that if we miss a spoken signal we can get a clue as to what the person said by the person's facial expression or a gesture. Here is a Japanese exit sign.



While if you have good eyes and can read Japanese and/or English the image of a person walking in the direction of the arrow and the color green suggesting “go” are not necessary. But if you cannot see well or read either language you can still predict where you should move to leave the building you are in. Many signs contain LV + NV. In this case, there are two uses or print in two languages and three uses of visual mediums that appeal to our eyes: the color green, the arrow and the image of a person walking.

The technical term for communicating the same meaning in different ways is redundancy. *Redundancy* appears in many circumstances. In almost all countries of the world, though not in the United States, different denominations of paper money are produced in different sizes and printed in different colors and often with different pictures. If we miss the numbers, we can recognize the different colors and sizes.

Because US paper currency is all the same size, an organization representing blind people in the United States has sued the United States Treasury to try to force the American government to print different denominations in different sizes so that blind people, who need this extra redundancy, can check to see whether the change they are given is correct.

Redundancy applies not only to the use of many mediums to communicate the same message but also to add features of language in the same medium. When we write, “He has two daughters” the word *daughters* is an example of redundancy. Why do we say *daughters* rather than *daughter*? Well, one reason is that if we miss the word *two*, we are able to understand that the person has more than one daughter by the use of the alternative form, *daughters*.

### **Mediums plus the source and purpose of the communication**

Though writing NV to categorize words in red in a dictionary, or adding NO to a transcript to indicate odor is being communicated as well as words, or drawing an earring in a transcript and labeling it NV can lead to insights, and if we discuss them with students, we can learn more, we can learn even more if we note other characteristics of communications.

Obviously, both who is communicating and the purpose of each communication is crucial. In classrooms, the usual sources are the teacher, individual students, and groups of students, the whole class, guests or people in video or audio recordings we play.

Outside of classrooms, train conductors, bank clerks, customers, and friends communicate with each other. In some settings, one person is in a role similar to that of a teacher—a train



conductor—and passengers are like students. In other places, like when friends are having coffee together, they are like students doing pair or group work.

For those in charge, I use **T**, for individual students, those who are expected to receive the communication, who are the target audience, I use **S**, for pairs or small groups I use **SS**, and for the whole class I use **SSS**. Guests in a class, outside observers or people who are there but not participating or not expected to participate, I indicate with a **G**.

Here are four purposes that cover most communications. I call them moves. Again, sorry for the jargon. A move is simply a communication with one of the purposes I describe. Feel free to use words you feel comfortable with to describe the purposes of your communications. I borrowed the terms from Arno Bellack's book *The Language of the Classroom*. (Teachers College Press, 1966.

*Structuring moves*—making announcements, explaining grammar or vocabulary, comments tour guides make; they require no active response from those being addressed, **STR** for short.

*Soliciting moves*—setting tasks or asking questions—open your books to page 22, Define Eskimo, take off your coat; to which an active response is expected, **SOL** for short.

*Responding moves*—performing tasks or answering questions, or not, **RES** for short.

*Reacting moves*—commenting or indicating with a smile or a high five to indicate that what a person has done has been accepted or understood or correct, commenting or noting with a glare that the response or solicit was not acceptable, giving a response that shows confusion, panic, etc, or a lack of understanding, **REA** for short.

### **Tips on Recording classes**

Most DVDs of classes produced by publishers and Boards of Education are produced with the camera focused on the teacher.

There are occasional quick scans of the students, but it is impossible to hear what the students say or really see what they are doing most of the time. As a result, there is no way we can analyze the interactions.

When you make a video recording of your class, point the camera at a couple of students for ten minutes, then at another pair, etc., so that you have a recording in which you can hear what half a dozen pairs of students are saying and see what they are doing. You will be able to hear yourself easily.

If you have a couple of students take pictures of what you do and what is written on the board and shots of you asking questions you can see your gestures, movements and what mediums you use other than writing words—LV.

### **Initial Results**

Though each class has some unique features, in most classes, the patterns of interaction are similar. The teacher is usually in charge of *Structuring*, *Soliciting* and *Reacting* and the students are responsible for *Responding*. The proportion of communication is two thirds from the teacher and one third from the students. When students do pair or group work their proportion increases, of course.

Speech—LA—is the main medium. Teachers tend to speak from 140 to 160 words per minute. Though teachers use gestures—PV—and move about—PO—and draw sketches on the board—NV, students are usually expected only to speak—LA. They tend to say individual words in response to questions and in pair work to speak garbled English.

There is no reason to believe me. View and listen to a recording of your class—three minutes provides a big enough sample. Nor is there any reason to judge the data you find as either negative or positive. Rather, a central purpose of coding what you and your students do is to see what is going on and then consider alternatives.

If you find that your students never ask questions, for example, they only respond and never solicit and they respond using only speech—LA, one option is to ask them to write some questions—LV. They can then either write responses to their own solicits or in pairs write answers to each other's written questions. In this way, the proportion of student solicits will increase. Also the use of writing will increase—more LV rather than LA.

You will also see that the number of words they use will increase. And, you will be able to see more of the errors they make, which are hard to notice and keep track of when they speak. As you find the errors, you will know what patterns you need to teach in the next lesson.

You and your students might initially resist writing questions, since the present fad is for students to communicate only orally in English in class. But once you and they see that they can say more and speak more correctly if they first write solicits and responses, you and they will stop resisting.

One crucial step, though, is to have students say their questions without looking at their written versions. If we use the labels for the mediums of communication, the steps should be LV—writing the questions, S—silence while thinking about what they wrote, and then LA—saying what they have written without looking at the written versions. The wait time between writing and speaking makes it more likely that students will understand what they are saying and that they will be able to remember it later.

We can say aloud words we have written while looking at the words without understanding them. In fact, we can say words in any language that uses written symbols we can read as we look at them printed on a page. But saying words that we are not looking at usually requires understanding, though with a lot of time and effort, meaningless language can be memorized.

In fact, anytime we change one medium to another—written words to speech—LV to LA, a sketch into spoken words—NV to LA, if we pause—S for silence, we will remember better because we cannot simply repeat. We have to think of the meaning of what we are saying or writing.

## **What is the content of our communications?**

While the medium, source, audience or target, and purpose of communication, are important features of communications, if we do not have a way to indicate what the content of our communications is, we will be limited in our analysis of what we are doing.

If the people who analyze conversations between customers and bank officials ignore what customers are talking about, they will not be able to improve their service. If a customer asks about an investment and the bank official says, "It's a pleasant day." the customer will not be satisfied.

In our classrooms, it is crucial to note what the content of our communications is. Here are four main topics to start our analysis of what we are communicating.

1. Making announcements, giving directions, making perfunctory or formulaic statements like "OK, very good" or calling the roll I call **PROCEDURE**.

2. Talking about language, defining words, or discussing parts of speech I call **CONTENT LANGUAGE**.

3. Teaching a subject, such as tourism, cooking, or algebra, I call **CONTENT OTHER**.

4. Sharing personal information, feelings or experiences I call **LIFE**.

Many universities are trying to integrate the teaching of language and other areas of content. By labeling the content of teacher and student moves, it is possible to see the extent to which such integration is or is not taking place.

If a student says, "I have a headache." we cannot tell whether he is communicating **LIFE** or **CONTENT LANGUAGE** without the context. If he is repeating a sentence from a textbook, then he is communicating **CONTENT LANGUAGE**. If he really has

a headache, the content is LIFE. So coding what we communicate has to take into account the context and what happened before.

### **Trying Alternatives**

One purpose of identifying the mediums we use and the content and the purpose is to create alternative activities. If we see that we always give directions using speech—LA, we can try giving directions using sketches—NV.

We can also ask students to draw sketches to represent directions such as read silently, fill in the blanks, or listen and pause and then write what is said. Pointing to the sketches will not only save time but might also be more engaging. Just as we ignore train announcements, so students often ignore, even if they understand, which is not always likely, long directions.

Ironically, one of the few times that what we say while teaching is meaningful is when we give directions. “First, we are going to list some things you liked to do when you were 10 years old. Then, we will write some things you liked to do when you were 15 years old.” Here the teacher is demonstrating sequence and using a similar pattern. But if we ask students to transcribe what the teacher said from a recording, even if they have control of the play/stop buttons, few will be able to write what the teacher said. If the teacher asks the students to transcribe these directions and helps students do so, they will master the language.

But if students are not asked to transcribe and practice the language, they will not learn it. They can guess what they are supposed to do from understanding a few words, particularly if they have done the task a few times before. But to master what some call “rich comprehensible input,” they have to listen over and over to a recording and transcribe the language.

If we see that all of our reactions to students’ responses are spoken comments like “very good”—LA—we can try shaking hands—PO. A central purpose of describing what we do using the categories is to provide a visual description and then substitute alternative mediums, areas of content or purposes to create alternatives.

I mentioned earlier that when we ask students to pause between reading something silently and then saying what they have read, they are more likely to understand what they say. One test of this claim is to look at whether they use any gestures. When students read aloud as they look at a text they are holding in their hands, they cannot use any gestures because they are holding the book. When their hands are free, if they do not use any gestures as they say what they have just read silently, they may not be understanding what they are saying.

Gestures—PV—are a very important indicator of understanding. You have seen people who have had a stroke who have difficulty speaking and at the same time cannot move their hands or fingers. Speaking is not just using our vocal cords but our bodies as well. When we speak on the phone, we use gestures not to help the other person understand us, since the other person cannot see us, but to help us to express our meaning.

### **Ways we use mediums**

I have been describing the purposes of communications—STR, SOL, RES, REA, the sources and targets—T, S, SS, SSS, G, the mediums we use, and the content with little attention to how we use mediums. Here are 5 ways we use mediums.

1. When we listen, observe, read silently, smell, or eat, I say we are taking in mediums, and I use the word ATTEND. You can use any word you like to indicate this use of mediums.

2. When we say something is correct or not correct, a noun or a verb or an adjective, a long word or a short word, ugly or beautiful, or a bad smell or a good smell, or in any way describe the characteristics of a medium, I use the word CHARACTERIZE. Use any word you like to indicate this use of mediums.

3. Explaining or defining and making inferences, I call EXPLAIN—INFER. If a student responds to the question “Is the boy happy?” after reading the sentence “The boy is feeling good.” He is seeing the relationship between the words *happy* and **feeling good**.

4. When using speech and other mediums to communicate facts, I say we are PRESENTING—STATING. If we ask questions we know the answer to, I say we are PRESENTING—QUESTIONING. When we ask questions we do not know the answer to, I say we are PRESENTING—QUERYING.

5. When we ask students to copy what they see or repeat what they hear, I say they are using mediums to REPRODUCE SAME MEDIUM. Again, you can use whatever word you and your students feel comfortable with or that is helpful.

Reading silently and saying what we have read, whether or not we pause in between, is REPRODUCE CHANGE MEDIUM—LV to LA. When we give a dictation, whether or not the students pause between what we say and when they start to write, we are asking students to REPRODUCE CHANGE MEDIUM—LA to LV. Writing captions under pictures is changing NV to LV, another way we can have students REPRODUCE CHANGE MEDIUM. When students draw a sketch to show their feelings about tasting something sweet, they are changing NO to NV.

### **Features of mediums**

If I speak very quickly or very slowly, I am using the same medium—LA—but the effect is likely to be very different. If I am standing straight or slumping, the consequence might be different. If students speak softly and cannot be heard, it is different from when they speak loudly. If I wear a bright red jacket rather than a black one, both are coded NV but they might have a different effect.

So after you identify the mediums you and your students use, it can be helpful to note features of the mediums. Of course if we say that we are speaking quickly or slowly or the comment is correct or incorrect, we are moving towards making judgments.

But the terms *quick* or *slow*, *correct* or *incorrect* need not be judgmental. They can be descriptive if our purpose is to analyze rather than to judge, which would also be a novel way to use such categories.

Here are three versions of a sentence, which students created when their teacher asked them to produce novel versions of “I love pizza and wine.” They did not consider the word *novel* as judgmental but rather as descriptive.

Below, you can see how 3 students wrote, “I love pizza and wine.” They not only combined pictures and letters—NV and LV—but also arranged them in different ways, some like a crossword puzzle. Though crossword puzzles are not novel, arranging sentences like a crossword puzzle is novel to most people.

w  
I love pizza  
n n  
e d  
.

I l voe pziaz nad wnei.





## Counting and trying the opposite

Below is a list of the main categories you have been reading about.

**Table 1 Five characteristics of communication/ways we communicate—C in Table 1 is short for communication/ways we communicate**

Source/ Target of C	Purpose of C	Medium Used to C	Ways Mediums are used to C	Content of C
Teacher to Student	<b>STR</b>	LA	<b>Attend</b> listen read silently smell	<b>Life</b> personal feelings personal informa- tion
Student to Teacher		LV		
		LO		
Teacher to Students	<b>SOL</b>	NA	<b>Characterize*</b> differentiate evaluate examine illustrate label	<b>Proce- dure</b> discipline names teaching directions
Students to Teacher		NV		
Student to Student	<b>RES</b>	NO	<b>Present</b> query question state	<b>Language**</b> grammar pronun- ciation vocab- ulary word order etc.
Guest to Class		PA		
	<b>REA</b>	PV	<b>Relate</b> Explain infer	
		PO		<b>Reproduce</b> different medium

Student to Guest	<b>S</b>	same medium	<b>Other</b> business chemistry tourism etc.
		<b>Set—give</b> Example	

\*\*Obviously there are many more areas of language—spelling, sound letter correspondence, genres; these are just a few examples of the possibilities.

### **\*Characterize**

Here are a few examples to illustrate the subcategories of *Characterize*. I am providing subcategories with examples because this use of mediums is very unusual in classes both in reactions—giving explicit feedback—and in Yes/no and either/or questions that ask students to notice features of language. Though teachers do ask questions like “What part of speech is apple?” they usually do so after they have told the students the part of speech and simply want to see if they recall this fact.

One reason might be because few methods books discuss these types of questions and the use of explicit feedback is considered by some teachers to be embarrassing. But in many surveys, 90% of students want to be told things like “add *ing*, you need the article *a* before *book*, the word *he* goes after *did* not before—after a student said, “Where he did go?”

*Present state*—answering questions the person asking knows the answer to--and *Reproduce same medium* are the most frequent ways we communicate.

### **Differentiate**

Do the ends of these words sound the same?  
Walked, waited?

Do these sound the same or different?  
I go  
I goes

Are these two faces the same?



### Evaluate

Is this correct? He go to school?  
Is this correct? I love to play tennis.

### Examine

Does this word have two syllables or three?  
going  
How many eyes are shown in the faces above?  
*Walked* has one syllable, not two.

### Illustrate

*Equestrian* a not a frequent word.  
The sketches for sad and happy are simple.

### Label

Tennis and judo and baseball are nouns.  
The final sound in *goes* is voiced.  
Is *an* a function/mortar word?  
Add the article *an* before *apple*.

As you look at a three -minute excerpt from a video or audio recording of your class and examine a transcript of the excerpt, you can tally the mediums you and your students are using. You can count how often the content is *Procedure*, *Content Language*, or *Content Other*, and you can see which ways you and your students use mediums most frequently and least frequently.

As you tally the source and target, purpose, medium, use and content, you will notice that some combinations are vary rare. After looking at video clips of hundreds of classrooms, I noticed that teachers never drew sketches of words like *is*, *a*, *the*, which some call *function words*. I call them *mortar words*, a term suggested by students. Another term they suggested was *in between words*.

They had drawn sketches of words like *elephants*, *apples* and *cars* before, which most call *content words*, but when I asked some students for a label for them they suggested brick words. For function words they suggested calling them *mortar words*.

Initially I coded both types of words as CONTENT LANGUAGE but saw that this categorization was too general and so added the sub categories *mortar* and *brick words*. As a result of my tally, I started to ask students to draw sketches of mortar words. When I asked them why I wanted to have them draw words like *is*, *are*, *a*, they said that they could understand the grammatical meanings of these words better than when they just saw the words themselves.

Our brains have different ways of remembering images, gestures, mortar words, brick words, etc. The more mediums we ask students to use, the more pathways they will have to recall things with their minds. Here are sketches showing lexical and grammatical content—another way of describing function and content words, brick and mortar words, or in between words in contrast to regular words.

When a number of teachers asked their students to draw one sketch for each word in sentences in a dialog about exercise that contained sentences like these—I like to play baseball. Do you like to play baseball or do judo or swim?—they produced the sketches in the table below.

The completed table below is an example of the use I call set. Most solicits contain a request to do something—present question if the person asking knows the answer—and present query if the person does not know the answer—and a set. In the solicit “Taste this cookie and tell me how it tastes.” the cookie is the set. In the

solicit “Say words that these sketches represent as I tap each sketch” the set is the sketch in the table below. In “Please listen to this song.” the set is both the lyrics and the music of the song.

Most sets teachers use are printed materials or recordings—LV and LA. Of course pictures are used also—NV—but mainly to communicate lexical meanings, not grammatical or phonological or other types of meanings.

So as you analyze your teaching and discover the mediums you use most of the time and those you never use a simple alternative is to try sets that we communicate through other mediums. Outside of class we use the whole range of mediums. We taste things, we smell things, we feel things, etc.

*A completed table from some students*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		♥		∅	🍷		
👤	👤	👤		📄	👤	👤	?
👤	👤	👤	2	👤	👤	👤	
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	.
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	
👤	👤	👤		👤	👤	👤	

Here are some sentences and questions generated from the sketches in the table that others first wrote and then said to each other after fellow students pointed to sketches in each column.

I love to play volleyball but I hate to sing.  
I like to dance, swim and jog, but I don't like to play baseball.  
Do you like to swim or do judo?  
I like to play baseball and ping-pong but I don't like to dance or sing.  
Ichiro loves to play baseball but he doesn't like to do judo, swim, dance, sing or jog.  
Michael Jackson loved to sing and dance.  
Michael Jordan loves to play basketball, sing and dance, but he hates to swim.  
Do you like to swim and jog?  
Does Maria like to play baseball or volleyball?  
Akiko and Junzo like to do aerobics and they like to dance.  
Matsui loves to play baseball.  
Does Ali love to play baseball?

Though such a table could be constructed without ever hearing of my grouping of mediums—NV, LV, etc., by using the terms to describe what we do and noticing that we never use sketches to represent function words—mortar or in between words, it is easy to create new activities on our own. In fact, though I said such a table could be constructed without my categories, I have never seen such a table elsewhere. Nor have hundreds of teachers I have asked.

### **Generating Alternatives**

Just as we can generate hundreds of sentences from the options in the 8 columns illustrating the difference between “I like to swim; I like to play tennis; I like to practice judo; Do you like to dance?” etc., we can create hundreds of different activities in our classrooms by combining the categories of the 5 characteristics of communications in Table 1 above listing the 5 characteristics of communication that I suggest you use to analyze your teaching.

## **One or two characteristics of communications at a time--Small Changes**

For many years, sailors got a disease called scurvy. One of the causes of scurvy is a lack of vitamin C. When sailors were on land and ate oranges, they were healthy. But when they were on the ship and did not eat oranges, they got scurvy. At some point they realized that for some reason eating oranges or limes or lemons prevented scurvy. And at another point, someone discovered that all these citrus fruits contained the vitamin called vitamin C.

Eating citrus fruits while on voyages enabled sailors to keep healthy even on very, very long voyages. That small change—eating oranges, lemons or limes while sailing between places that were very far apart—had a very profound and positive impact.

As you note who is communicating to whom, the purpose of the communication, what mediums are used, the ways mediums are used, and the content they communicate and then change just a couple of the characteristics—like having students write your questions as well as their answers in their notebooks—and compare this with asking your students to answer only orally, you can note the different consequences.

For even a three-minute transcript of a class, it will take a lot of time to note all five characteristics of communications that I have introduced. So one option is to note only one or two during each viewing. Who is communicating with whom and what are the purposes of their communications? could be the first two questions. Then when you view the video clip again, you could note the mediums you and your students used. On a subsequent viewing you could code ways that you and your students used mediums. And on still another viewing, you could note what content you and your students communicated.

If you find that you always ask your students to copy words you have written—reproduce same medium—ask them to write the words in mirror writing. Or have them draw a sketch for each word—reproduce change medium.

I am suggesting the alternatives not to replace what you are doing but rather as supplements to what you are doing. Your students, their parents, your principal all have expectations that are not in tune with the alternatives I have suggested as well as the ways I have suggested to create new activities and are different from those found in any textbook.

The textbooks you use and the examinations your students have to take, which are often unrelated to how well people communicate, limit what you can do. But if you and your students see the positive effects of manipulating the five characteristics of communications, you can be liberated from the constraints of the textbooks you use and the unreliable tests that your students are subjected to.



## Appendix Using the categories to describe a few small changes

I have consistently suggested that you look at only one or two characteristics of communications at a time in a 1 to 3 minute recording/transcription of your teaching. If you see that you always ask students to respond only by speaking—LA—you can try asking them to respond by drawing sketches—NV—or writing—LV.

If you are keen to see how to code all 5 characteristics and then decide on making substitutions, I have provided an excerpt in which I code all five characteristics.

Whether you code one or two or five characteristics, the goal is the same—to make a change in medium used, use or content or source and target or purpose and then compare the results.

Here are two coded transcripts one from Day 20 and one from Day 21 with changes underlined>.

### Day 20

T: Good morning.	T to SSS	STR	LA	Present State	Procedure-formula
SSS: Good morning.	SSS to T	REA	LA	Present State	Procedure formula
T: Look at the picture on page 12.	T to SSS	SOL	LA+ NV	Present Question + Set	Language
How many birds are there?				Present Question	Language
S: Twet.	S to T	RES	LA	Present	Language

				State	
T: (Writes Twenty on T to S Board and Twet.)		REA LV	SET	Language	
Same or different? T to S		SOL LA+	Present Question SET	Language	
		LV			
S: Different	S to T	RES LA	Characterize Differentiate	Language	
T: Very good.	T to S	REA LA	Present State	Procedure	

### Day 21

T: ( <u>Mouths the words Good morning.</u> )	T to SSS	STR LO	Present State	Procedure-formula	
SSS: Good morning.	SSS to T	REA LA	Present State	Procedure formula	
T: Look at the picture on page 12.	T to SSS	SOL LA+ NV	Present Question + Set	Language	
<u>(Writes on board: Write 3 questions about the picture</u>		LV	Present query	Unspecified	
<u>SSS: Are those birds young?</u>		RES LV	Present Query	Life	
<u>What kind of birds are they?</u>					
<u>How many birds are there?</u>					
T: ( <u>Shakes students' hands</u> )		REA PO	Characterize	Life	

I first wrote about my coding system in an article in the TESOL Quarterly I titled *Beyond Rashomon* in 1977. I expanded the article into a book I titled *Breaking Rules*. An amazing coincidence that both my article and the book that I wrote that grew out of the article have the initials *BR*, which I just noticed. “The obvious is difficult to see.” As Gregory Bateson always said—all the more reason for coding to help us see the obvious!

Here are the references for both items.

“*Beyond Rashomon*--conceptualizing and describing the teaching act. 1977. *TESOL Quarterly*. Vol. XI, March. (Reprinted in *Observation in the language classroom*. 1988. Edited by Richard Allwright. London: Longman.)

*Breaking rules--Generating and exploring alternatives in language teaching*. 1987. White Plains, New York: Longman. Reprinted 2012.

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