The classroom language of larger and smaller classes

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Abstract
This paper compares the discourse of two parallel classes, one large and one small by investigating talking time, use of L1, use of student names, questioning, feedback, directives and discipline. The findings show that the two classes differ in terms of the use of student names and the strength and impersonality of directives. For the other issues which primarily concern teacher-student interaction, there are no clear differences between large and small classes.

Two questions set, but largely unanswered, by Coleman (1989a) in the *Lancaster-Leeds Learning in Large Classes Research Project* are What actually happens in large classes? and How do teachers modify their behaviour in large classes? These questions imply that there are differences in how teachers and learners participate and interact in large and small classes. In this article, I will focus on two lessons and search for differences in the language used between a larger class and a smaller class.

In focusing on a more specific level than interaction analysis, I will be concerned with the analysis of classroom discourse. In this chapter, then, I intend to conduct what might loosely be called a discourse analysis. Rather than applying any specific approach to discourse analysis, however, I will follow Schiffrin's (1994) argument that any effective discourse analysis needs to be multidisciplinary in its approach. Since we are focusing on classroom discourse, in addition to the linguistic underpinnings traditionally associated with discourse analysis, I will also use pedagogical and educational concepts and analyses in this paper. In doing this, I hope that I will be able to show whether the classroom discourse in the two lessons analysed is markedly different in any way.

If teachers' beliefs that smaller classes are more effective for learning (see the previous article) are valid, identifying those aspects of classroom discourse where there are differences between large and small classes will allow us to identify aspects of classrooms that may have an influence on learning. This would then allow us as teachers to evaluate these aspects and see whether it is possible to use the language patterns associated with smaller classes in larger classes and thus ameliorate some of the effects of larger class sizes.

Aspects of classroom discourse

In taking a broad view of discourse, to conduct a valuable analysis, we will have to identify certain aspects of the discourse to investigate. Since this paper compares the discourse of larger and smaller classes, the aspects we decide to investigate should be those aspects which are most likely to be affected by class size. I will therefore be somewhat biased in my choice of aspects of discourse to investigate. This bias is intended to highlight those aspects of discourse which are most likely to have an effect on learning and which should therefore be addressed when teaching large classes.

There are seven aspects of the discourse that I intend to focus on as follows:

1. Teacher and student talking time

In classrooms one of either the teacher or the students is responsible for any stretch of classroom talk. The relative balance between these two potential speakers can be seen by comparing teacher talking time and student talking time. In the literature, a high proportion of teacher talk is often seen as problematic (Gower et al., 1995; Scrivener, 1994; but cf. Lewis, 1993) since when the teacher is talking, students' opportunities to practise are reduced (Hubbard et al., 1983). The problems of a high teacher talking time are even more apparent in large classes where encouraging teacher-student interaction is often seen as a problem (e.g. Coleman, 1989b, 1989c; but cf. Kumar, 1992). Moreover, a high teacher talking time can be taken as evidence of a power imbalance between the teacher and the students (Phillips, 1997; Watson Todd, 1996), whereby the more a teacher hogs the available talking time, the more she is exhibiting her power. This last point is important, since from a naive viewpoint we could expect that more students in the classroom would lead to a higher student talking time. However, the need for the teacher to exhibit her power with larger groups probably overrides the effects of more potential student talkers in the classroom. We might therefore expect that teacher talking time would increase in a large class.

Hypothesis 1: Teacher talking time is higher in a larger class than in a smaller class.

2. Use of the L1

Teaching in large classes may force teachers to use the students' first language (L1) more than they might otherwise do (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Woodward, 2001). While the L1 may be used to serve certain pedagogical purposes, it is widely agreed that the majority of language use in the classroom should be conducted in the target language (see Auerbach, 1993; Watson Todd, 1997 for summaries of the arguments). In large classes, teachers may feel that the problems of ensuring comprehensible communication with all students necessitate greater use of the L1. We may therefore expect that the classroom discourse of large classes may contain a greater proportion of L1 use than that of small classes.

Hypothesis 2: L1 is used more in a larger class than in a smaller class.

3. Use of student names

Using the students' names can help to build positive relationships between the teacher and the students, a key factor in classroom learning (Allen, 1999; Epanchin et al., 1994). In larger classes, however, the sheer memory load of learning all of the students' names may make this impossible (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hubbard et al., 1983; LoCastro, 1989). While teachers may wish to address the students individually by name, in large classes we may expect that the teacher's use of students' names is less than in small classes.

Hypothesis 3: The teacher refers to the students by name less frequently in a larger class than in a smaller class.

4. Questioning and initiations

A frequent pattern of classroom communication is the IRF format first identified by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975), where the teacher initiates by asking a question, a

student responds and the teacher gives feedback on the response. A quick glance through the classroom discourse examined in this study confirms that such IRF patterns are common in both lessons. Before we look at the characteristics of IRF communication, however, we need to consider whether the teacher is the only person who can initiate in the classroom. Although teachers exhibit their greater power by being responsible for almost all initiations in most classrooms (see e.g. Sinclair & Brazil, 1982), it is possible for students to also initiate (see Garton, 2002). Given the greater chance of a student losing face (an important issue in Thai culture) in a large class, we may expect the students to make fewer initiations in large classes than in small classes.

Hypothesis 4: Student initiations are less frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Focusing on the teacher initiations, when asking a question a teacher has a range of choices available, some of which could be influenced by the size of the class. One issue is the amount of open-endedness in the communication. Teachers in large classes can feel forced to use more teacher-centred and closed-ended approaches to teaching (Hubbard et al., 1983), and for questioning this might be reflected in a higher proportion of closed-ended questions as opposed to open-ended questions (see Moore, 1989; Tsui, 1995; Watson Todd, 1997; Wu, 1993) in large classes.

Hypothesis 5: Closed-ended teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Another potential effect of being forced to use a more teacher-centred and closed-ended approach involves display and referential questions. A display question is one to which the teacher already knows the answer, and a referential question is one where the teacher does not know the answer (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Tsui, 1995; Watson Todd, 1997; Wu, 1993). As with closed-ended questions, we might expect a teacher in a large class to resort more frequently to using display questions.

Hypothesis 6: Display teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

A further issue concerning question types is the level of cognitive demand of the question. It has been argued that large classes are appropriate for learning factual knowledge but not for higher-order thinking skills (e.g. Obanya et al., n.d.). It might be expected, therefore, that higher-order questions occur less frequently in large classes.

Hypothesis 7: Lower-order teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

There are two further issues about questioning that may be important. Firstly, the number of teacher questions which receive a response may be influenced by the size of the class. In a larger class, students may have more difficulties in hearing questions, the teacher may have more problems in hearing student replies, and students may feel shyer in answering questions. We might therefore expect that a lower proportion of teacher questions receive replies in large classes.

Hypothesis 8: Proportionately fewer questions receive a student response in a larger class than in a smaller class.

A final issue regarding teacher questioning is the extent to which questions may need to be modified before a response is received (see Cole & Chan, 1987; Watson Todd, 1997). In a larger class with more students and background noise, we might expect that the teacher would need to repeat or rephrase questions more often than in a smaller class.

Hypothesis 9: Proportionately more questions are repeated and/or rephrased in a larger class than in a smaller class.

5. Teacher feedback on student responses

The teacher feedback moves in IRF discourse are a key factor in determining the effectiveness and function of stretches of such discourse (Cullen, 2002; Nassaji & Wells, 2000). Such feedback moves may involve simple echoing of the student response (Cullen, 1998; Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000), judgments or evaluations on the student response (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982), restatements of the student response (Bowen & Marks, 1994), or requests for further clarification (Nassaji & Wells, 2000). Of these judgmental feedback moves most explicitly signal the teacher's power, while requests for clarification are generally the most learner-centred. Given the pressures on teachers in large classes, we might expect that IRF sequences in the classroom discourse of large classes would contain more judgmental moves and fewer requests for clarification.

Hypothesis 10: There are proportionately more judgments and fewer requests for clarification as feedback moves in IRF sequences in a larger class than in a smaller class.

6. Surface forms of directives

A further way in which teacher power can be manifested, albeit largely unconsciously, is through the strength of the directives used when the teacher gives instructions to the students (Watson Todd, 1996). Examining the directives that teachers use in classrooms, Holmes (1983) categorises the directives according to their surface form into imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives. These categories can be further subdivided so that, for example, imperatives may comprise base-form imperatives, base-form imperatives plus 'please', present participle imperatives, verb ellipsis, and let + first person pronoun imperatives. Some of these forms are pragmatically less polite and indicate a perceived greater distance between the speaker and the audience. Perhaps the strongest form is the base-form imperative, while modal interrogatives indicate a perceived closeness between the speaker and the audience. Given the potential need for greater demonstrations of teacher power with large classes, we might expect that the teacher's directives with large classes would be manifested through stronger surface forms.

Hypothesis 11: The teacher's directives in a larger class use stronger surface forms than those used in a smaller class.

7. The language of classroom management and discipline

Classroom management and discipline issues are perhaps the most widely perceived problems with teaching large classes (e.g. Coleman, 1989b; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hayes, 1997; LoCastro, 1989; Nolasco & Arthur, 1986; Sabandar, 1989; Ur, 1996; Woodward, 2001). To investigate how management and discipline issues are manifested in classroom discourse, there are two aspects we can examine. Firstly, the more discipline problems there are, generally the more explicit teacher utterances focusing on discipline there will be. With discipline problems more likely to occur in large classes, we may therefore expect a greater frequency of teacher utterances dealing with discipline in large classes.

Hypothesis 12: There are more teacher utterances explicitly dealing with discipline problems in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Secondly, the way in which such utterances are manifested may differ between large and small classes. In large classes, these utterances may be more impersonal and address the whole class rather than individual students. Also, as with the surface forms of directives, the utterances may be expressed in stronger language in large classes. A further aspect of this last point is that utterances which aim to simultaneously build rapport and treat discipline problems, such as I-messages (see Guillaume, 2000), are less likely to occur in large classes.

Hypothesis 13: Teacher utterances dealing with discipline problems are more impersonal in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Hypothesis 14: The teacher's utterances dealing with discipline in a larger class use stronger surface forms than those used in a smaller class.

By attempting to test the validity of these 14 hypotheses, I hope that I will be able to identify any aspects of classroom discourse that differ between larger and smaller classes. This may allow me to identify the aspects of classroom discourse that teachers of large classes may wish to focus on in their teaching to make the classroom language of a larger class more similar to that of a smaller class.

The data

The data analysed in this study come from an English language support course for undergraduates of science and engineering, where an experienced teacher was teaching the same lessons to two groups of students. One of the groups consisted of 23 students and is termed the smaller class in this study, and the other consisted of 41 students and is termed the larger class. A pair of lessons was chosen, one for each class on the same topic. Both lessons consisted of introducing the ideas of conducting a survey to students, raising their awareness of key issues in conducting surveys, asking students to decide on survey topics in groups, and asking a representative from each group to present their ideas for a survey to the whole class. The participation structures in the lessons were a mixture of teacher mini-lectures, teacher-fronted interaction, student groupwork, and student presentations.

Both lessons were video recorded using two cameras, one focusing on the teacher and one on the students. The teacher was given a microphone and another microphone was placed facing the students. Despite these preparations, it was not possible to record students' interactions in groupwork and there were also problems in hearing both the students and the teacher during student presentations. Because of these problems, the following analysis focuses on those parts of the lesson where the interaction is between the teacher and the whole class. This restriction should not seriously affect the study as such plenary interactions are those points where we might expect the greatest differences in classroom discourse between large and small classes.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: Teacher talking time is higher in a larger class than in a smaller class.

There are three main ways in which the teacher talking time and student talking time can be compared: by counting the amount of time each spends as a speaker, by counting the number of turns each takes, or by counting the number of words each contributes to the interaction. The first of these approaches is problematic from a practical perspective. Timing teacher and student turns is laborious and complicated, and dealing with pauses and silence in the interaction is difficult. The second approach, while the most straightforward practically, does not shed much light on the interaction. In full-class interaction, we may expect a pattern of alternating turns, even though the length of each turn may vary greatly. Simply counting turns, therefore, does not tell us about the proportions of the available class time used by each speaker. I will therefore use the third approach and count the number of words each of the speakers produces. In addition, I will also count the number of turns so that the average length of each turn in terms of number of words can be calculated. The findings regarding these for the two lessons are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Teacher and student talking time

	Smaller class	Larger class
Number of teacher turns (including non-verbal)	144	133
Number of teacher turns (verbal only)	142	119
Number of student turns (including non-verbal)	122	87
Number of student turns (verbal only)	79	63
Total number of words spoken by teacher	4913	4316
Total number of words spoken by students (not including presentations or groupwork)	161	140
Number of words/verbal turn for teacher	34.6	36.3
Number of words/verbal turn for student	2.0	2.2

From Table 1, we can see that, although there are large differences between the amount of talk of the teacher and the students, the differences between the smaller class and the larger class are minor. For all measurements of talking time, the data for the two lessons is comparable. We can therefore conclude that there are no real differences in teacher talking time between the smaller class and the larger class.

Hypothesis 2: L1 is used more in a larger class than in a smaller class.
While identifying L1 use in classroom discourse is straightforward, where the L1 is Thai as in this case, analysis of amount of L1 use is less clear. Written Thai contains no breaks between words and what constitutes a single word is often unclear, even in spoken Thai. We cannot therefore simply count the number of words spoken in Thai. Furthermore, we need to distinguish between use of L1 for proper nouns and other uses of L1. To analyse L1 use, therefore, I will count the number of turns which contain some L1 use, excluding proper nouns, and I will also try to assign functions to each instance of L1 use. Doing this, we find the patterns of L1 use given in Table 2.

Table 2 Use of L1

	Smaller class	Larger class
Number of turns involving L1 use	5	11
Utterances by teacher involving L1 use	2	3
Utterances by students involving L1 use	3	8
Functions of L1 use		
Student asking a question (student initiation)	-	2
Student responding to teacher question	3	3
Teacher echoing student L1 response	2	2
Teacher making a joke	-	1
Students informally chatting to teacher	-	3

Although more than twice as many instances of L1 use were found in the larger class than in the smaller class, the overall numbers are so small that no conclusions can be drawn from this finding. We cannot therefore conclude that L1 was used more in the larger class than in the smaller class.

Hypothesis 3: The teacher refers to the students by name less frequently in a larger class than in a smaller class.
Counting the teacher's use of student names is straightforward and unproblematic. In addition to basic frequency information, I will also examine the number of different students to whom the teacher refers by name. The findings concerning this are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Teacher's use of students' names

	Smaller class	Larger class
Number of times teacher uses a student name	52	5
Number of individual students referred to by name by teacher	11	4

From Table 3, the frequency of the teacher's use of students' names differs very noticeably in the two lessons, both in terms of the frequency of use and in terms of the number of students the teacher refers to. For the two lessons examined, therefore, there is a difference in the teacher's use of students' names in the smaller class and the larger class, confirming Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4: Student initiations are less frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.
Student initiations can be identified using the criteria set out by Garton (2002). A student initiation is any student turn on the main floor of the interaction where the turn is not given in response to any eliciting behaviour of the teacher. Following these criteria, we can identify student initiations in the two lessons and assign functions to them. These are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Student initiations

	Smaller class	Larger class
Number of S initiations	2	14
Functions of student initiations		
Student corrects teacher regarding previously elicited information	2	-
Student asks a question for clarification of the previous teacher turn	-	4
Student asks a question for information	-	3
Student repeats a teacher statement	-	2
Student makes a joke	-	1
Student chats to the teacher	-	4

Although the last category of students chatting to the teacher could be excluded as this only happens as the lesson is winding down, there is still a marked difference in both the number of student initiations and the functions these initiations serve between the two lessons. However, this difference is the opposite of that expected with students making more initiations in the larger class than in the smaller class.

Hypothesis 5: Closed-ended teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.
For hypotheses 5, 6, 7 and 8, we need to identify instances of teacher questions. In doing this, the focus is on the function of teacher utterances rather than the surface form. Although most questions in the data are in the form of interrogatives, there are some instances of unfinished sentences (see Gower et al., 1995) which function as questions. We also need to consider how to deal with a series of questions, each of which is asking for the same information. In this study, such repetitions or rephrasings of questions are considered as single questions where they are adjacent in the discourse and not separated by a long pause.

Having identified all the instances of teacher questions, we next need to categorise them into closed-ended or open-ended questions. Closed-ended or convergent questions "limit student responses to only one correct answer", whereas open-ended or divergent questions "allow for many possible correct student responses" (Moore, 1989: 172-173). An example of a closed-ended question from the data in this study is: 'Who is the President of KMUTT?', and an example of an open-ended question is: 'How many people would you like them to fill in your questionnaire?' Instances of each type of question were counted and the findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Closed-ended and open-ended questions

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Open-ended questions	45	46.9	32	45.7
Closed-ended questions	51	53.1	38	54.3

Although fewer questions were asked by the teacher in the larger class, the proportion of closed-ended to open-ended questions in the two lessons were very similar, and thus for this situation we can conclude that class size is not a factor in determining the proportions of closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Hypothesis 6: Display teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Referential questions are knowledge-seeking where the asker does not know the answer. On the other hand, with display questions, the asker already knows the answer and is testing knowledge (Watson Todd, 1997). An example of a display question from the data is 'What do we call it? Start with *in* ... right. *In* ... what?', and of a referential question is 'Which team would like to start?' Display questions generally match closed-ended questions, and referential questions generally match open-ended questions. However, open-ended display questions and closed-ended referential questions may occur with enough frequency to make a separate analysis of these worthwhile. The numbers and proportions of teacher display and referential questions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Display and referential questions

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Display questions	47	49.0	39	55.7
Referential questions	49	51.0	31	44.3

Although there is a slightly higher proportion of display questions in the larger class, the differences between the smaller class and the larger class are not enough for us to conclude that class size is a factor influencing the teacher's choice between using display and referential questions.

Hypothesis 7: Lower-order teacher questions are proportionately more frequent in a larger class than in a smaller class.

One of the most influential pedagogical categorisations is Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, which attempts to categorise educational goals in terms of the cognitive level of the goal (see Orlich et al., 1998; Sparks-Langer et al., 2000). Although the taxonomy contains six levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation), it can be simplified into two categories of lower-order thinking (the knowledge level) and higher-order thinking (the other five levels. This classification can be applied to individual teacher questions as well as to educational objectives allowing us to categorise the teacher questions. An example of a lower-order question from the data is 'What is number three?', whereas 'Why do we survey this topic?' is a higher-order question. The results from the two lessons regarding the cognitive levels of questions are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Lower-order and higher-order questions

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Lower-order questions	78	81.2	57	81.4
Higher-order questions	18	18.8	13	18.6

It is noticeable that lower-order questions greatly outnumber higher-order questions in both lessons. The proportions of the two question types, however, are very similar, suggesting that there is no difference in the cognitive levels of questions asked in the smaller class and the larger class.

Hypothesis 8: Proportionately fewer questions receive a student response in a larger class than in a smaller class.
For all teacher questions, whether they elicit a student response or not can be identified. In doing this, we need to consider non-verbal student responses (such as nodding) as well as verbal responses. The frequencies of questions receiving a response are given in Table 8.

Table 8 Teacher questions receiving a student response

	Smaller class	Larger class
Number of T questions	96	70
Number of T questions getting a response	76	52
% of T questions getting a response	79.2	74.3

As with the other findings concerning teacher questioning, there appears to be little difference between the two lessons, indicating that, in this study, whether or not a question receives a response is not affected by class size.

Hypothesis 9: Proportionately more questions are repeated and/or rephrased in a larger class than in a smaller class.
For the previous four hypotheses, I have been examining teacher initiating moves rather than the more syntactic question. Thus, even where a question receives a response, it may have been repeated or rephrased two or three times before the response was forthcoming. These repetitions and rephrasings still request the same information from the students as the original phrasing of the question. Counting these, we find the results shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Repetitions and rephrasings of teacher questions

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Questions which are repeated	13	13.5	8	11.4
Questions which are rephrased	14	14.6	14	20.0

Although a slightly higher proportion of teacher questions are rephrased in the larger class in the data in this study, this does not appear to be a major issue as the differences between the two lessons are small.

Hypothesis 10: There are proportionately more judgments and fewer requests for clarification as feedback moves in IRF sequences in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Following a teacher question and a student response, in classroom discourse it is common for the teacher to give feedback on the response. This feedback may simply echo the student response, may make a judgment on its appropriateness, may rephrase the response, or may involve asking for more details. Furthermore, the first three of these options may either accept (or be neutral) or reject the student's response. Categorising and counting the frequency of each of these possible types of feedback gives the results shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Types of feedback

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Number of teacher feedback moves	95		73	
Accepting echo of S response	27	28.4	22	30.1
Rejecting echo of S response	2	2.1	2	2.7
Accepting judgment on S response	28	29.5	26	35.6
Rejecting judgment on S response	1	1.1	-	-
Accepting restatement of S response	26	27.4	17	23.3
Rejecting restatement of S response	5	5.3	1	1.4
Asking for more details of response	3	3.2	5	6.8
Other e.g. focus on loudness of response	3	3.2	-	-

As with the results concerning teacher questioning, although there are minor differences in the feedback between the smaller class and the larger class, none of the differences are marked enough for us to conclude that class size has noticeable effects on the types of teacher feedback moves.

Hypothesis 11: The teacher's directives in a larger class use stronger surface forms than those used in a smaller class.

There is a general match between the surface form of a directive and the strength associated with it. For example, a base-form imperative is nearly always stronger than a modal interrogative directive. Using this as the starting point, the directives of instructions in the data were categorised using Holmes' (1983) classification. Where appropriate, new categories were created to deal with forms of directives not covered in Holmes' analysis. Table 11 shows the absolute and relative frequencies of each of the types of directive arranged from strongest to weakest.

Table 11 Teacher directives

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Number of teacher directives	63		65	
Negative imperative e.g. 'Don't forget'	4	6.3	8	12.3
Imperative e.g. 'Think about this'	20	31.7	30	46.2
Gerund e.g. 'Tomorrow, collecting data'	-	-	1	1.5
Please + imperative e.g. 'Please look at your friend's face'	3	4.8	10	15.4
Verb ellipsis e.g. 'Now last team'	5	7.9	5	7.7
Let's phrase e.g. 'Let's think'	7	11.1	2	3.1
You-declarative e.g. 'You have to come up in class'	15	23.8	4	6.2
Other declarative e.g. 'The thing you have to do is to think about the topic'	1	1.6	-	-
I-declarative e.g. 'I give you one minute'	6	9.5	4	6.2
Modal interrogative e.g. 'Would you please move closer?'	3	4.8	-	-

In Table 11, there is a noticeable difference in the strengths of the directives used in the two lessons. The four strongest categories of directives are all more frequent in the larger class, with the five weaker categories all being more frequent in the smaller class. There does, therefore, appear to be a relationship between the strength of directives used and the class size in the data in this study.

Hypothesis 12: There are more teacher utterances explicitly dealing with discipline problems in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Hypothesis 13: Teacher utterances dealing with discipline problems are more impersonal in a larger class than in a smaller class.

Hypothesis 14: The teacher's utterances dealing with discipline in a larger class use stronger surface forms than those used in a smaller class.

The data in Table 11 concerns those directives which were given by the teacher for direct learning purposes, i.e. the behaviour being directed by the teacher for effective performance on largely preplanned activities. In contrast, the teacher also gives directives in response to student behaviour which aim to change that behaviour so that the learning environment is more conducive to learning. These latter directives concern discipline. For these directives, we can examine their overall frequency, look at the language used to refer to students, and investigate the surface forms of the directives used. Table 12 shows the data from the two lessons concerning these three aspects of discipline-oriented directives.

Table 12 Discipline-oriented directives

	Smaller class		Larger class	
	No.	%	No.	%
Number of discipline-oriented directives	32		33	
Use of impersonal 'Class'	6	18.8	15	45.5
Use of student names for discipline purposes	7	21.9	1	3.0
Negative imperative e.g. 'Don't miss something'	1	3.1	-	-
Imperative e.g. 'Listen carefully'	10	31.2	11	33.3
Noun phrase e.g. 'Attention please'	-	-	4	12.1
Adverb e.g. 'Louder'	4	12.5	-	-
Adverb + please e.g. 'Louder please'	2	6.2	-	-
You-declarative e.g. 'You should speak louder'	1	3.1	-	-
I-declarative e.g. 'I can't hear your voice'	1	3.1	-	-
Would-you-request e.g. 'Would you please listen?'	-	-	2	6.1

Unlike the directives used for instructions, the strength of directives used for discipline does not appear to be related to class size. Similarly, the frequency of the teacher addressing discipline problems is almost the same in the smaller class and the larger class. However, in line with the data concerning the teacher's use of students' names, in the larger class the impersonal 'Class' is used more frequently.

Discussion

The generalisability of a study like this based on only two lessons is dubious. However, given that there have been no previous published comparisons of the discourse of large and small classes, I hope that the findings may give teachers some idea of those aspects of classroom language which are worth paying particular attention to when teaching large classes. These aspects are most likely to be the ones for which the findings show a difference between the larger and the smaller class in support of a hypothesis. The findings above fall into three categories concerning whether they support the 14 hypotheses or not as shown in Table 13, and only three of the hypotheses (3, 11 and 13) show a difference between the two lessons in a way which may concern teachers of large classes.

Before we focus on the three points which may be of most concern to teachers of large classes, let us first consider the other eleven hypotheses. To some extent, these findings are surprising in that, when setting up the hypotheses, I had an expectation that the findings would provide support. We therefore need to consider why the findings did not support most of the hypotheses.

Classrooms are very complex environments with a multitude of factors having the potential to influence classroom events and learning. In this study, attempts have been made to control some of the more important of these factors by investigating two lessons taught by the same teacher and involving the same content. However, there is

Table 13 Summary of findings

Findings supporting a hypothesis (and thus of concern to teachers of large classes)	Use of student names (hypothesis 3) Strength of directives in instructions (hypothesis 11) Level of impersonality in disciplinary directives (hypothesis 13)
Findings not supporting a hypothesis	Amount of teacher talking time (hypothesis 1) Use of L1 (hypothesis 2) Use of closed-ended questions (hypothesis 5) Use of display questions (hypothesis 6) Use of lower-order questions (hypothesis 7) Number of questions receiving a student response (hypothesis 8) Number of questions repeated or rephrased (hypothesis 9) Types of teacher feedback (hypothesis 10) Frequency of disciplinary directives (hypothesis 12) Strength of disciplinary directives (hypothesis 14)
Findings standing in contrast to a hypothesis	Number of student initiations (hypothesis 4)

still a myriad of potentially important factors which have not been controlled. In setting up the hypotheses, we are assuming that class size is more important than these other factors (controlled or uncontrolled). For those hypotheses where the findings do not support the hypotheses, it would seem that there are other factors involved which take precedence over class size in the aspects of classroom discourse examined.

Interestingly, most of those aspects for which the findings do not support the hypotheses concern teacher-student interaction. Although some studies have suggested that interaction may be a key problem with classes (Coleman, 1989b, 1989c; Ur, 1996), this does not appear to be the case in this study. Instead, it is likely that other factors are more important than class size in determining interaction patterns and opportunities for students to speak. One factor which may be more influential than class size is the types of activity used in the classroom (Kumar, 1992). If this is the case, then in this study where the two lessons examined involved very similar activities, we should perhaps not be surprised that there is little difference in the classroom interaction between the larger class and the smaller class. If it is the case that activities are more influential than class size, then teachers of large classes would need to try to ensure that a larger class size does not adversely affect their choice of activities to include in a lesson.

Learning student names and strength of directives

Looking at those aspects where the findings support the hypotheses and which may be of concern to teachers of large classes, the basis for hypotheses 3 and 13 probably concerns the same problem of remembering student names in a larger class. While this may seem to be a minor practical issue that does not directly affect teaching and learning, students' concerns about impersonalisation in larger classes may need to be addressed (Carbone, 1996) and there is some evidence that a teacher's correct use of names is correlated with a lack of discipline problems (Nolasco & Arthur, 1988). It

may therefore actually be more important for teachers of large classes to remember and use students' names than for teachers of small classes.

The learning of students' names can present a challenge to teachers of large classes, particularly if they are teaching several large classes concurrently. To help with this problem, there are some suggestions for how to learn student names in the literature (Duppenthaler, 1991; Gower et al., 1995; Hubbard et al., 1983; Nolasco & Arthur, 1988) which may be of use:

- Spend part of the first two or three lessons getting students to introduce themselves.
- If the students do not know each other, play some name-learning games in the first couple of lessons.
- Use the students' names consciously in the first few lessons.
- Ask students to sit in the same seat every lesson.
- Make a seating plan with the students' names on it.
- Ask students to make name cards that they can put on their desks.
- Ask students to make group posters introducing themselves to put on the back wall of the classroom.
- Make a student picture roll card file with photos and names of each student and on which you can keep a mini-record of their problems, interests, progress and so on.
- Try to associate the students' names with some personal characteristic.
- When checking the register, look at who answers each name.
- When handing back homework, call out the students' names.
- Check the students' names to yourself when they are engaged in pairwork or groupwork.
- Copy out the list of the students' names.
- If you cannot remember a student's name, be open and ask.

The issue of the strength of directives used in giving instructions could also be considered a practical issue. The way in which classroom management issues are treated depends largely on the teacher's perceived need to retain control. In large classes, there may be a greater perceived threat to teacher control and therefore the teacher uses stronger language forms. There are no easy ways to resolve potential problems concerning the strength of directives. While a teacher of large classes may wish to reduce strength of the language she uses, she is probably also very concerned about potential discipline problems arising from doing this. The strength of directives used in instructions therefore may be an area that teachers of large classes should simply be aware of when teaching as an area of potential concern.

Conclusion

Although there are problems with the generalisability of this study, the findings suggest that there are actually few differences concerning classroom discourse between large and small classes. On the one hand, this is a comforting result since teachers of large classes may not need to worry much about their classroom language; on the other, the findings are not very helpful since any perceived differences between large and small classes cannot be explained in terms of classroom language but may be due to some other, as yet unidentified, factor. Nevertheless, the findings concerning the importance of learning students' names may be helpful and be put into practice readily. Although this may appear little to get out of a study like this, I still

believe that conducting this research was worthwhile, if only to show how many surprises research into large classes can throw up.

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