Team teaching with an ALT in elementary school English Activity classes:
Co-teaching interactions

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This study explored team teaching interactions when a Japanese elementary school teacher and an ALT engaged in co-teaching, when both teachers interact with the class directly as part of the same teaching activities. Selections were made from transcribed video-recordings to illustrate a range of patterns, which might serve as a basis for further research. Analysis revealed closely coordinated interactions with teachers sharing management even in the same IRF sequences and in explanations. It is argued that such interactions are tailored to the elementary school English focus on experiencing communication as opposed to teaching the code.

Key words : team teaching, EFL, classroom interaction, elementary school English

1. Introduction

Team teaching writing and research has mostly concentrated on team teaching arrangements, on roles of teachers and to a lesser extent on problems with systems and in the teams themselves. Most of this has concentrated on the junior and senior high school settings since team teaching at elementary school did not become widespread until the introduction of the first nationally approved materials, Eigo Notto in 2008. This study seeks to fill some gaps by concentrating on the elementary school situation and by focusing on classroom interaction in the team teaching situation.

Aline & Hosoda (2006) took a close look at the elementary school situation visiting 6 schools and fully transcribing 6 team-taught lessons. Their observations identified four roles for the Japanese classroom teacher: bystander, translator, co-learner and co-teacher. The present study took up the role of co-teacher and sought to show some of the richness of the co-teaching interactions with an eye to showing a range of patterns for future research.

Lessons at a university-affiliated elementary school and at a mid-sized elementary school in rural Kyushu were videotaped, transcribed, and coded according to an adapted version of FOCUS (Fanslow, 1987). Transcriptions were scanned for examples illustrating co-teaching and were then subjected to a more detailed consideration and analysis. The selections come from 5 different lessons and involve combinations of 3 different teachers and 3 ALTs.

It was found that rather than a pattern of divided labor where teachers took charge of activities in succession or where ALTs play well-defined roles directed by the teacher (as one might expect typically in JHSs) the teacher and assistant often acted together and/or in parallel in the same learning activity. This study identified situations where teachers participated in the same IRF sequence at all points. In addition, this study shows teachers explaining content jointly and switching languages.

It is argued that these are good examples to students of teachers of different cultures and backgrounds engaging in real communication and cooperating with each other. The non-stereotyped interchange, non-stereotyped in the sense that roles and language choice is fluid, may be due, largely, to the communicative focus of the lessons as opposed to the code focus of JHS English classes.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned above previous studies often concentrated on team teaching arrangements and teacher roles. Cunningham (1960, cited in Bailey, Dale & Squire 1992) identified four types of team teaching, the: team leader type;

associate type; master teacher/beginning teacher type, and; the coordinated team type.

The team leader type is the sort relevant to Japanese schools. Institutionally, the classroom teacher (CT) is responsible to see that the curriculum guidelines and school policy is implemented. On a practical level, the CT has detailed knowledge of each child's needs, abilities, their mood from day to day and their development over the school year. The CT is clearly the leader although this has sometimes been relinquished due to a lack of knowledge and confidence in English resulting in what Sturman (1992) calls the foreign expert problem, in which the foreign teacher is considered the fount of knowledge and the Japanese teacher cedes responsibility.

Wadkins, Wozniak & Miller (2004) distinguish three types of team arrangements: collaborative teaching, tag- team teaching and coordinator of multiple guest speakers. Collaborative teaching, the relevant case here, is where the course and/or lessons are apportioned according to each teacher's own strengths and specialties. Collaborative teaching benefits both the students and the instructors in the following ways: 1) students experience different teaching styles; 2) faculty cover their own specialties; and 3) instructors can learn from each other. If team teaching is done well, students will see instructors working interactively to achieve a common goal.

The Northern Nevada Writing Project Teacher-Researcher Group (1996) identifies four team teaching arrangements: 1) dual-directed teaching where each teacher deals with the students directly 2) alternating as lead instructor with the partner helping or reinforcing 3) each teaching small groups the same thing or 4) each teaching small groups different things. The dual-directed and the alternating lead instructor style are clearly relevant to team teaching practices in Japanese schools.

Most pertinent to the present study is Aline & Hosoda (2006). Through observation and transcription of Japanese elementary school English classes, they identified four roles played by the classroom teacher (CT): 1) bystander, in which the CT moves to the side and intervenes only when a problem presents itself 2) translator, where they render verbatim what the ALT has said 3) the co-learner, where the HRT plays the good language learner, and 4) the co-teacher where each instructor is addressing the students directly.

3. Method

Data used in this study was collected from a university-affiliated elementary school and a mid-sized public school in a rural locality in Kyushu. Lessons were video-recorded and teacher interactions with each other and with students were transcribed. Transcriptions recorded both linguistic and other-than-linguistic communication including gestures, demonstrations, deixis or other behaviors considered part of the message.

The transcriptions were coded using a system adapted from FOCUS (Fanslow, 1987) for source and target, move, medium and other classifications as needed. Relevant excerpts were selected and analyzed again. Although messages were originally assigned multiple codes, this paper will present only one code for each message, chosen for how well it sums up the purpose of the message.. The codes used are: solicit (sol), response (res), reaction (rea), and from Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) frame (fr). Other codes will be introduced and explained when needed. Although this paper uses the FOCUS codes, solicit, response and react, the three-part teaching pattern will be referred to as IRF—initiation, response and follow-up—(Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) as it is the most widely used.

4. Analysis

4.1   IRF Osmosis

We will commence with simpler patterns and proceed to the more complex. The excerpts chosen illustrate co-teaching, that is teachers working at the same time and directly with students. All teachers involved are very familiar with the schools, the classes and with one another.

The first example involves a specialist elementary school teacher (SET) that is one who is licensed to teach English but who works only at elementary school. She is in charge of planning and teaching all English classes at the school. She is an early-career teacher and is coded SET(E). The ALT is a Japanese woman who has lived overseas and who is experienced in teaching English to small groups of children in a conversation school setting. She is coded as ALT(J) in

the excerpt.

Table 1 *Consecutive coordination: Sharing the closing sequence*

	Source/Target	Message	Move
1	SET(E), SC*	stand up please (moving her hands upward)	sol
2	SC, SET(E)	yes (stand up)	res
3	SET(E), SC	*ka-ado wa kono nakani irete kaette kudasai* "Please put your card in here before you leave."	sol
4	ALT(J), SC	that's all for today good bye (waves hands)	fr
5	SC, ALT(J)	good-bye (waves hands) finish (puts both hands together) bow	fr

*SC=all students in the class

Here the SET starts the closing sequence in 1, asking the students to stand up. The closing sequence is interrupted by an additional solicit in 3, then the ALT performs the final closing directly with the students. The teachers cooperate, acting consecutively one after the other to close the lesson.

Teachers may work together even more closely, sharing the IRF sequence. I will refer to this as IRF osmosis. In the next excerpt this occurs in the reaction slot. The excerpt in table 2 involves a mid-career classroom teacher (CT) working with a mid-career male ALT from Australia coded ALT(B).

Table 2 *IRF osmosis in reactions*

	Source/Target	Message	Move
1	ALT(B), S1	Where do you want to go? (points at S1)	sol
2	S1, ALT(B)	I want to go to Libya	res
3	ALT(B), S1	Wow!	rea
4		Why?	sol
5	S1, ALT(B)	Because I like Qadafi	res
6	ALT(B), S1	*honmaya* "Is that true" (hugs S1)	rea
7		see you	fr
8	CT	*abunai abunai* "Dangerous, dangerous."	rea

Here we see two rounds of the stereotypical IRF pattern managed by the ALT. However, the CT has been attending to the interaction and adds his reaction at the end. The unexpected and humorous messages by the student in 2 and then in 5 give the teachers a chance to react to content rather than form. The content focus is further in evidence in that both teachers react in Japanese, something that would be frowned upon in a more code-focused setting such as junior high school.

The next excerpt illustrates IRF osmosis in the solicit slot. The ALT is an American woman with a high level of fluency in Japanese and with around five years experience teaching in Japan. She is coded ALT(M) for Mary. She works exclusively in this small rural school district and knows the children and her co-teacher well. The Japanese teacher is a regular elementary school teacher in mid-career with a license to teach English. She is designated to plan and teach all English Activity classes. She is coded SET(M).

The ALT begins conducting an activity but is immediately concerned as to whether everyone can see the screen, asking students in 2. The SET enters the interaction and tries to confirm the same thing with her solicits in 5 and 6. Both confirm that everything is fine and that things may proceed with reactions in 8 and 9. Finally, the trouble over, the ALT resumes explaining the procedure in 10.

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Table 3　*IRF osmosis in solicits*

	Source/Target	Message	Move
1	ALT(M), SC	so please look (points at her eyes) at the screen (points at the electronic blackboard)	sol
2		can you see numbers all the way around? (points at numbers on the screen)	sol
3	SS*, ALT(M)	*(response unobserved in video)*	res
4	SET(M), SC	(points at numbers on the screen) small, sorry	rea
5		okay? can you see? (puts her hands around her eyes like she is using binoculars)	sol
6		yes? no? (moves her body from side to side)	sol
7	SS, SET(M)	yes	res
8	SET(M), SC	okay	rea
9	ALT(M), SC	okay	rea
10		so please repeat after me, me (points at herself) you (points at SC) me (points at herself) you (points at SC) okay? (okay sign with thumb and forefinger)	set, p**

*SS=a subgroup of students
**set, p=setting a procedure to be followed later

It is notable that each teacher uses both English and gestures to perform their solicits. The SET is probably not coming in because she feels the students may not understand—she would likely translate or use Japanese in that case—it is joint or parallel management.

In the next example, see table 4, teachers make similar solicits, but this time in different languages. After explaining what they are going to do, the ALT starts the activity with a solicit in 3 saying "*douzo* 'Here we go,' " while the CT uses English to pace the start with "one, two." They are co-managing, not translating with one teacher working through the other. Communication is the focus, not code. This is confirmed by the ALT reacting to content with his humorous reaction in 7, instead of remarking on students' form in 6.

Table 4　*IRF osmosis in solicits: different languages*

	Source/Target	Message	Move
1	ALT(B), SC	all right these are the words (put hands around mouth) let's go please sing after me ready?	set, p
2	CT*, ALT(B)	yes	res
3	ALT(B), SC	such a feelin's coming over me (wagging forefingers)	set, c*
4		*douzo* "Here we go."	sol
5	CT, SC	one, two	sol
6	SC/CT, ALT(B)	such a feelin's coming over me	res
7	ALT(B), SC	(holding himself and shaking)	rea

*set, c=setting content to be used later, content to be repeated in this case

It should be noted in passing that the CT participates in the IRF osmosis in the response slot, message 6, repeating along with the students. This shows another aspect of co-teaching where a teacher models the part of student while remaining at center stage and without relinquishing their teaching role. This is distinguished from the co-learner role (Aline & Hosoda, 2006) in which the Japanese teacher moves off center stage to participate as a model student.

4.2   Joint Explanations

Finally, content must be delivered, explanations must be made, and in this area too, we find examples of closely intertwined co-teaching. In table 5, the SET reacts to the students' mistaken answer, which then becomes the teaching point. The ALT picks up on this right away and tells the students she will explain in 5. It is unclear whether the teaching point was planned beforehand and was perhaps forgotten by the ALT, or whether it emerged spontaneously from the students' mistake, but the ALT's "Ah" in 4 and the SET's laughter in 6 would suggest on-the-go planning and negotiation between teachers.

Table 5   *Co-Teaching: Explanation osmosis*

	Source/Target	Message	Move
1	ALT(M), SC	what time is it? (points at the clock on the wall)	sol
2	SS, ALT(M)	nine four	res
3	SET(M), ALT(M)	nine four? Just nine four?	rea
4	ALT(M), SET(M)	ah	rea
5	ALT(M), SC	*ja tokubetsu iikata oshiechaokka* (bends her knees just a little bit) "Okay, let me teach you how to say it in a special way."	fr*
6	SET(M),SC	(laughing) okay	rea
7	ALT(M), SC	*jitsu wa jitsu wa ne itsumo no toki wa suji suji* (extends one hand at a time) *dakedo okay datta ne* "To tell you the truth, usually you only need number, number, right?" *demo arutoki kara arutoki made* (writing on the BB) *chotto chigaimasu* "But it's different from a certain time to a certain time."	exp**
8	SET(M), SC	*un* "Uh huh."	rea
9	ALT(M), SC	*ippun kara kyufun made wa* (point at the BB) *tokubetsuna* (nod) *iikata ga arimasu* "There is a special way of saying from 1 minute to 9 minutes."	exp
10	SET(M), ALT(M)	*ja* "Well" (raises her hand in front of her face) nine	exp
11	ALT(M), SC	[nine four (points at the top and bottom in the air with her hand)]	exp
12	SET(M), ALT(M)	[demo "No." (makes an X with her arms)]***	exp
13	SET(M), SC	*a- tsujinai tte* "Ah, she says it won't be understood."	exp
14	ALT(M), SC	*nanika iru* "You need something."	exp
15	SET(M), SC	*nanika* "Something" (point at the BB) *demo kaitearu tokoro ni arune* "But there is something written there."	
16	SET(M), SC	*nani* "What" four?	sol
17	SET(M), SC	*nihongo dattara* "if that is Japanese, (raises her forefinger) *kuji yonpun de* "nine four" (shakes her forefinger) *gu-* "Good" (make an okay sign) *demo ne* "however"	exp
18	SET(M), SC	*demo nanka* "But something" (point at the BB) *Mary sensei ga kaiteru toki ni*, one *toka* nine *no mae ni nanka aru ne* "There is something before one or nine when Ms. Mary writes."	sol
19	ALT(M), SC	*hinto wa zero nandakedo* "The hint is zero but," (points at the BB) *kon kai wa moji-tekina iikata wo shimasu* "This time, we use a letter to express the time."	sol
20	SS, ALT(M)	O, O	res
21	SET(M), SS	O! (puts her hand on her cheek) wow	rea
22	ALT(M), SS	(cups her ear) that's right (points at SC)	rea

* Frame is used here because she indicates she is about to begin something
** exp=explanation
***square brackets in 11 and 12 represent simultaneous speech

From 7 to 15 the teachers go back and forth with an explanation aimed at stimulating the students to come up with the solution until finally in 16, the SET hints directly with a prompt. The prompts continue in the solicits of 18 (SET(M)) then 19 (ALT(M)) which finally results in the students solving the problem. Each teacher then finishes with a reaction of surprise and approval. As in previous examples, the teachers are working together and working directly with the students. While they make the same moves, they are not translating or echoing each other and they are each switching between languages for a communicative purpose, judging perhaps what the students will and will not be able to understand in English.

Implications

In the excerpts presented, it was shown that teachers interacted very closely, even participating in the same IRF sequence, here called IRF osmosis. Co-teaching partners were found to come in at all slots, solicits, responses and reactions. The same thing was found in the area of explanations, with teachers each taking part in the same explanation, making comments, offering hints to students and using both languages. The parallel messages were not repetitions or translations but mirrored, or paralleled the other teacher in function, and points to the prioritization of communication with students.

Such behaviors are in line with the communicative focus of elementary school English in which providing the experience of getting the message across is more important than teaching the code. Providing this experience makes the co-teaching arrangement more fluid in the elementary school team teaching situation as opposed to the JHS situation which requires tighter control on content and more concern with accuracy and, accordingly, more clearly defined teacher roles and interactions and a stricter separation of languages and a restricted use of gestures and other non-linguistic forms of communication.

Teachers improvising communication with each other, and with the students, means qualitatively different team teaching roles and interactions. Further research is needed to identify and quantify the differences between elementary school and JHS team teaching interactions and to inform recommendations on team language teaching in the elementary school setting.

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