

Teachers Talking About Teacher Talk

Chris Richards
Independent Researcher, Wales

Victor Hugo Medina Soares
Cultura Inglesa Minas Gerais, Brazil

“It’s so important to let teachers speak, to hear what they have to say” (Participant 4)

Abstract

Teachers whose lessons are based on communicative language teaching (CLT) (Richards & McCarthy, 2006) or similar approaches are often discouraged from engaging in too much teacher talking time (TTT) for the fear that otherwise, the result might be a lecture. Nevertheless, some of them may not be aware of what or how to critically cope with that. For example, a simple internet search reveals many articles offering teachers exactly this advice, sometimes with specific percentages about the proportion of lesson time that should be taken up with teacher talk.

CLT and Task-based Learning (TBL) (Nunan, 2004) are two methodologies that generally regard TTT as something to be kept to a minimum. The first one has strong leanings towards centering students and many activities using that methodology promote student-student interaction. Likewise, the latter heavily focuses on the interaction between students. In these methodologies, the amount of TTT might equate to a lack of learning opportunities for learners; hence lessons may be regarded as less effective if TTT is deemed high (Paul, 2003:76 (Esfandiari & Knight, 2013:20-21). However, limiting teacher talk runs the risk of ‘underestim[ing] the value of the teacher as both a source of input and an interactional pattern’ (Thornbury, 2006:225). In light of these points, this paper proposes a reflective analysis concerning when and how to make sound use of TTT, as the sole reduction of TTT does not amount to an automatic improvement of productivity in a lesson (Hitotuzi, 2005:105)

In this paper, we address a series of research questions regarding what teachers think about the amount of TTT they engage in. We draw on qualitative data from an online survey and the transcripts of follow-up interviews of survey participants who consented to a short, semi-structured interview with one of the researchers. In both the survey and the interviews, our main interest is how the participants themselves view the amount of time they spend talking in lessons. We ask them how much they believe their teachers talk during their lessons and whether they are happy with that amount. In addition, we are interested in whether specific lesson stages influence the amount of importance TTT has for the practitioner-participants. We also explore what might have contributed to the formation of the participant’s views, including initial teacher education or continuing professional development activities.

Key words: communicative language teaching, teacher talking time, Task-based Learning.

Introduction

Literature on teacher talking time (TTT) generally discusses how long it should be kept to and how it should be implemented. With regard to length, Thornbury (2006) refers to the idea that it should be kept to a minimum while maximising student talking time as 'received wisdom' (p. 225). Indeed, this maxim is repeated with such frequency that it is meaningless to try to find an original citation; it has become a self-evident fact within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Thornbury's use of the expression 'received wisdom' is quite a revealing turn of phrase. Received wisdom is not necessarily true or accurate and can often stand in the way of progress. This particular piece of received wisdom might well be an obstacle to progress in our pedagogy. This paper aims to bridge a gap in the literature on TTT by discussing how teachers feel about the teacher talk they engage in and exploring why they hold these views. It will also consider aspects such as initial teacher education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the form of both top-down activities like observation but also teacher-led ones, such as attending seminars and conference talks. It should be noted that whether minimal TTT produces quantifiably better test scores or other improved student outcomes is not the focus of this paper.

Literature Review

The ideas of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) had a discernible impact on pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman, 2008) and led to many training courses that 'insisted that teacher talking time (TTT) was counterproductive' (Darn). Put plainly, TTT is all of the time the teacher spends talking during a lesson, regardless of the content of that talk; alternatively, '[t]he amount of time you talk within a lesson' (Scrivener, 2011, p. 404). Thus, TTT might include greeting students, giving instructions, answering questions, eliciting from students, explaining concepts and so on. TTT is often opposed to Student Talking Time (STT) which CLT aims to maximise (van Lier, 2001, p.107).

Beyond defining TTT, the wealth of critical discussions on this topic is also noteworthy. The literature in this area tends to concentrate on the quantity and effectiveness of TTT in general. Walsh (2002), for instance, criticises the historic

focus on 'the quantity rather than the quality of teacher talk', which is a position he describes as 'both simplistic and unrealistic' (p. 2). His work highlights the need for teachers to be aware of the goal 'at a given moment in a lesson' (p. 3) such that it matches the pedagogic purpose. Here, Walsh echoes Nunan (1991) who argued that whether 70% or 80% TTT can be considered a good thing will 'depend on the objectives of a lesson and where it fits into the overall scheme of the course or programme' (p.190). Walsh (2002) argues that when 'language use and pedagogic purpose coincide, learning is facilitated' (p. 3) and, therefore, that ITE should 'devote more time and attention to language use in the classroom' (p. 16). However, despite the two decades which have passed since this study, there can be no doubt that this issue still puts pressure on teachers right up until the time of research.

Aside from quantity, several studies have investigated the quantity of TTT as a proportion of lesson time and Chaudron (1988) summarises four such studies conducted between 1977 and 1986. Historical though these studies might be, they still inspire later work such as Hitotuzi's (2005), which investigated the proportion of lesson time given to TTT in his own lessons to elementary and intermediate groups. Thus, we can see that the question has not gone away.

On the other hand, for several studies about the issue of high TTT in the language classroom, reduction of TTT per se is not usually the main objective. For instance, a number of strategies and procedures, such as management of error correction (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 191-192), allotment of waiting time for students after eliciting language or content (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 188), management of students' responses and elicitation (van Lier, 2001, p. 94-95), administration of students collaborative work (Richards and Lockhart, 1994, p. 153), may be found quite frequently in studies on TTT. In works of this type, therefore, quality TTT takes centre stage. Consequently, according to these types of studies, students will be better able to benefit from their teachers' use of L2 as a consistent model for their development thanks to teachers increased quality of TTT enhancing attainment of class objectives and students' overall language acquisition (Haliti, 2019, p. 14-15).

While there is a wealth of academic work investigating the quantity and quality of TTT, practitioners often do not have access to these sources. Since our study was interested in the experiences of practising teachers, we also conducted a search using the search term 'teacher talking time' on google.com to reveal what kind of information teachers might find. Results included a blog post from englishpost.org, published in August 2022 while data was being gathered for this paper. The post states quite clearly '[i]t has been determined that teacher talking time must be reduced and student talking time must be maximized' (Campos, 2022). The use of the passive voice suggests an established (scientific) fact and thus obscures the more complex questions of what kinds of TTT and when to use them. In addition, the use of 'must' adds to the imperative on teachers to act after having read this text. This result was not alone, and as a further example, in May 2021 the teacher training organisation Bridge also contributed to the discussion. Despite conceding that there is not a standard ratio of TTT to STT, the author blogged that 'the ideal amount of time teachers should speak in class is around 20-30% of the entire class time' (Nuñez, 2021). A ratio that favours STT would be pivotal for students' communicative opportunities and language proficiency attainment (Setiawati, 2012, p. 35). This is subsequently translated so that readers can put an actual number of minutes of TTT for a one-hour class. Interestingly, the calculation is inaccurate and places the upper bound at 15 minutes, not 18 minutes which is 30% of one hour. Thus, we see an arbitrary percentage followed by an arbitrary number of minutes, neither of which are attributed to an academic source.

So, while there is bountiful literature assessing the quantity and quality of TTT, and despite the calls for addressing the distinction and focus on the quality of TTT rather than its quantity, not much has been said about how teachers feel about the TTT they engage in. Teachers' feelings and their well-being have come under increased scrutiny in recent years, perhaps culminating in 2020 with Mercer and Gregersen's landmark publication *Teacher Wellbeing*. In asking questions about how teachers feel about their use of TTT, this study aims to shed light on how TTT and wellbeing interact, and on what ITE and CPD can do to better support teachers.

Research Questions

Our research aimed to move beyond the quantitative, extant research that times the duration of student and teacher turns, or analyses the types of turns in which teachers engage. Thus, we formulated two key research questions:

RQ 1 How do teachers view the amount of time they spend engaged in TTT?

RQ 2 What influences have contributed to the way teachers view their own TTT?

Methods

The data collection and analysis in this study encompasses three stages. The first form of data collection was a brief Google Form survey (see appendix one). After that, for the participants who were willing to further their contribution, there was a second stage, which consisted of an interview (see appendix two) with one of the study's researchers. Upon obtaining such data, the third stage ensued, with the transcriptions of the interviews being coded and interpreted.

The Google Form consisted of objective and discursive questions, and it was split into three sections. In the first section, the survey requested items of contextual and demographic data (such as the teaching qualifications held by the participant and the number of years of teaching experience they had) along with a consent term. After that, participants proceeded to section two and rated nine statements on a five-point Likert scale. At the end of the second section, there was one optional free text box to add any comment deemed relevant by the survey taker. The third section invited participants to share their names and contact information only if they either wanted a summary of the research findings or they wished to volunteer to take part in the second stage of data collection.

This second stage consisted of 10-15 minute semi-structured interviews. Questions were used as prompts for the conversation to allow the participant to explore their ideas as fully as possible. As we anticipated receiving responses from multiple countries, and due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, it was decided at the outset that all surveys would be conducted online via Zoom. A consistent approach leads to

more reliable data and a more equitable experience for participants, which is a more ethical approach. All interviews were recorded, which allowed the researchers to transcribe them later and focus instead on being a conversationalist and providing space for the participants to express their ideas during the interview itself.

A thematic analysis (Braun et. al, 2019) of the transcripts was undertaken. The first phase of familiarisation occurred during the transcription process itself, which is also an 'interpretative practice' (Riessman, 1993, p.13). While listening again to the participants' experiences and ideas, themes began to emerge. The researchers noted initial ideas for themes at this stage. Latent coding of the data occurred in phase two as the researchers established initial codes for the themes in the data. Further interrogation of the data and revision of the codes followed and led to the themes that are discussed below.

The analysis and collection of the data allows for triangulation of the information obtained by the researchers. This supports the mixed-method approach this study executes for its use of quantitative and qualitative data, in addition to the interpretation done by the researchers that aims for convergence in the responses of the participants (Fielding, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

An interview has been described as a 'social encounter' (Cohen et. al., 2007, p. 350) and this was a paramount concern for the researchers while planning and conducting interviews. In other words, we were acutely aware of the fact that our participants were humans, individuals and professional people and that we were asking them to reflect on their actions in classrooms. Thinking of an interview as a 'social encounter' helps to obtain and process data with sufficient respect for the participants. Furthermore, Cohen (2007) suggests that an ethical approach to interviewing requires that we spend time after the interview thanking the participant and this is a recommendation we followed with a specific period conversing with the participant but with the recording function of Zoom switched off. All of our participants, whether they were interviewed or just completed the survey, were also

offered a summary of this research paper. This action demonstrated the value we placed on their participation.

The interview schedule asked interviewees to reflect on and discuss their experiences during initial teacher education (ITE), continuous professional development (CPD) and during observations. We also asked them to talk about feedback that they had received from their students. Any or all of these questions might have invited participants to recall and discuss situations which they might have found uncomfortable at the time they occurred and/or at the moment of the interview. Pre-interview information was provided ensuring that participants were aware of their right to withdraw and of the types of questions that would be asked. Consent was explicitly sought to conduct and record the interview, transcribe it and use responses in the body of this research paper. Throughout, responses are anonymised and participants are referred to by number (participant 1, etc.).

The issue of power has to be negotiated with care. A power disparity exists between researcher and participant (BAAL, 2016) and there is always the possibility of a potential interviewee not feeling able to refuse consent. To mitigate this, the process was not rushed, with time left between noting a survey response and agreeing to the possibility of an interview before emailing to request the interview. Then, there was always time between the email exchange and the interview itself. Both steps allowed for participants to withdraw which, as noted below, some did. Participants were informed that their responses would not be linked to any identifying details and no questions were asked during the recording that might elicit specific details. Interviewees were also informed that recordings would be held only as long as the project lasted and these recordings were kept securely on password-protected and encrypted devices, with all data stored following GDPR regulations. Interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

The final aspect to be considered here is that of researcher bias. A research project should always grow from an area of interest for the researcher (Hall, 2012) and so it is inevitable that the researcher(s) undertaking a project will have views about the topic under investigation and these biases risk contaminating the data. Thus, the sets of questions for both the survey and the interview were developed and revised

over some time to eliminate potential bias. During the interviews, the data collection activity with least possibility for control and standardisation, questions were kept brief and researchers avoided interrupting the interviewees. Indeed, the researchers only spoke to ask questions, clarify questions, and thank and encourage participants, but without sharing their own views and experiences.

Results

Respondents and Demographics

Looking first at the data from the online survey to which there were 23 responses, the majority of our respondents (61%) had ten or more years of classroom experience, and while an overwhelming majority (87%) described themselves as a 'Teacher', 7 claimed the label 'Teacher Trainer' and 8 claimed the label 'Director of Studies/Academic Coordinator'. There was some crossover with these roles, for example, with respondents ticking 'Teacher' and 'Director of Studies/Academic Coordinator'. Unsurprisingly, those respondents with more classroom experience were also more likely to claim roles with greater responsibility. Respondents were based in Europe (70%) and South America (30%), which reflects the locations of the researchers and the reach of their networks in the field. Just over half (56.5%) were based in a private extracurricular language institution, with the next largest proportion of respondents (26.1%) working in a university setting.

What best describes the institution where you currently work?

23 responses

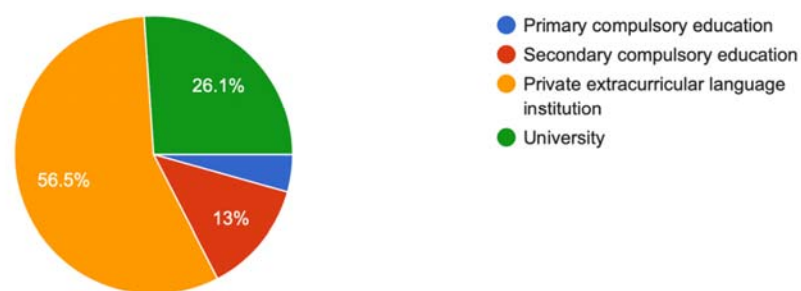


Figure 1: Participants' response regarding their current institutions

While participants held a range of qualifications, the most common ELT qualification was the Cambridge CELTA, which was held by just over half the participants (56.5%). Just over a third (34.7%) of participants also held either a DELTA or

DipTESOL. Three participants (13%) also stated that they had a qualification that enabled them to teach in state schools.

Discussion

Survey data

Respondents were asked to mark their level of agreement with nine statements. One statement stood out with 52.2% strongly agreeing that 'Minimising teacher talking time was a topic on [their] initial teacher education course'. No other statement generated that level of agreement amongst the participants; rather, many of the statements generated a variety of opinions. Few participants thought they should speak more while teaching with 43.5% strongly disagreeing with that statement, although 30.4% were on the fence neither agreeing nor disagreeing with it. There was also a reasonable amount of disagreement about whether they felt they should speak less:

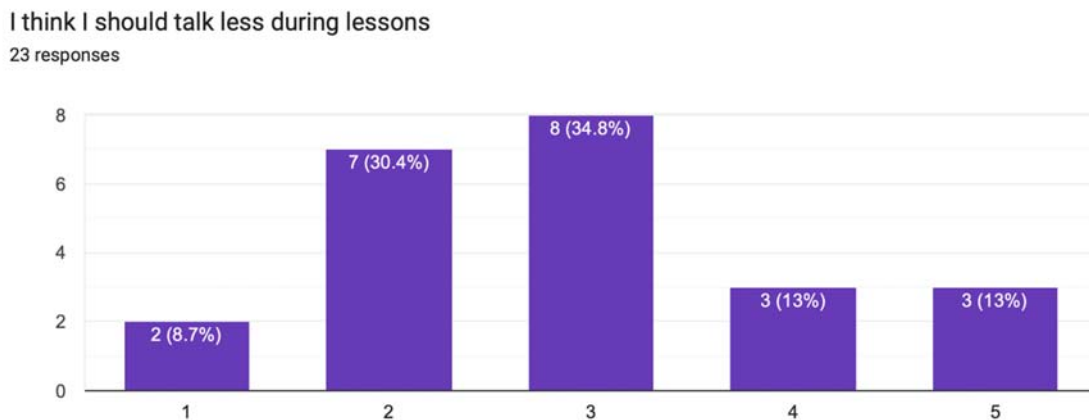


Figure 2 - Participants' perceptions about their TTT

This might be interpreted as suggesting that, on the whole, participants were happy with the amount of TTT they engage in. However, when asked to respond to that exact proposition, we see that although almost half agreed, only 2% strongly agreed and 7 participants somewhat disagreed:

I feel as though I spend about the right amount of time talking during lessons

23 responses

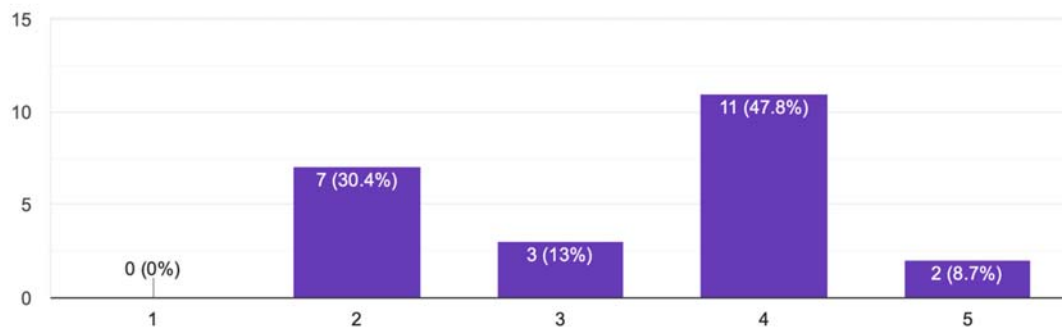


Figure 3 - Participants' self-evaluation of their TTT

One survey participant suggested that TTT is necessary because teachers facilitate and model language. This view is perhaps informed by socio-cultural learning theory and the idea of the need for a 'better other' (see Thornbury, 2006 p. 206-7). She also referred to what she calls an 'overemphasis' on 'keeping TTT to a minimum' and that this 'has become an overcorrection in the ELT industry'. This participant agreed with the statement 'I think there are times when it might be necessary for me to speak more, but feel like I shouldn't'. Another participant agreed about the importance of language models and suggested that '[s]ts also need quality input, so I don't worry too much about TTT'. A third remarked that while they had kept TTT to a minimum while an ECT, they now consider that if well used 'teacher talk can be really good for learning'. All three of these respondents had considerable (10+ years of experience) and strongly agreed that the topic of minimising TTT had been addressed during their ITE. A further respondent, also with considerable experience and qualified to DELTA level, commented that she is no longer 'obsessed over reducing [her] TTT' but rather she focuses on its quality. The grammar here is noteworthy as the participant chose to write using the copular construction which suggests a state (to be obsessed) rather than the verb which would imply an action.

Interview Data

Turning to the interview data, 17 survey respondents volunteered for a follow-up interview, of whom we were ultimately able to interview 8. When asked how they felt about their own current TTT, participants tended to fall into one of two camps. On the

one hand, some felt similarly to participant four, who stated 'I don't feel very comfortable - I honestly think I talk too much'; participant 1, for example, agreed and remarked quite simply: 'I always talk too much'. On the other hand, participant 5 exemplified the other camp and told us that as his experience grew, he managed to 'step out of the spotlight'.

While undertaking interviews, it was obvious, even before systematic analysis, that some themes were repeating themselves: the use of TTT in establishing relationships and developing rapport with students; the necessary use of TTT for effective explanations; the impact of ITE (and especially the CELTA and DELTA) on participants' awareness of and thinking about TTT; and student expectations. When referring specifically to ITE, participants on the whole made a direct connection between their tutor and input feedback during their courses and the importance of reducing TTT.

Relationships and rapport

Firstly, interview participants had a lot to say about the issue of relationships and rapport with their students and how this interacts with, and has an effect on, the amount of TTT they engage in. Participant 2 raised the issue of longevity with a student or group of students and how 'it's sort of like a friendship if you will, after three years of teaching them, we've built this relationship, so I think if you avoid talking, you're not really building that rapport'. For many participants, TTT was a tool that they used to build and develop relationships with students over time.

Commenting specifically on the issue of rapport, participant 3 pointed out that as a talkative person she finds it harder to resist being talkative, especially when she has a good rapport with her students. If there was a class discussion about a topic in which she had an interest, she said that she 'would want to share [her] opinions. Especially if [she had] good rapport with [her] students.' Participant 1 concurred about the importance of building relationships, especially with her young students, and the role that teacher talk played in building those relationships, suggesting that it is 'very necessary' in that context.

Participant 1, moreover, had been working at a primary school and suggested that 'school shouldn't just be about teaching' and she specifically differentiated teaching

from talking. She referred to the fact that in classrooms there are often social problems that need solving and, especially with younger students, the teacher must be involved in solving them and this inevitably leads to TTT (and although this was not explicitly stated, that TTT would be in L1). She commented that the 'only way you can survive in primary school is to build relationships' with your students and that this can only be done by talking with them. She implied that while low TTT might be a useful aspiration in some classrooms, for her and in her context there will always be high TTT by necessity.

Explanations

Another perceived contextual need for the use of TTT was highlighted by participant 7 who referred to explanations of grammatical concepts. She spoke about a tension between her belief that students can benefit from an inductive approach to learning grammar, but that she also perceives that her students are more comfortable when she explains grammar lecture-style and in their L1. As is so often the case, teachers are caught between scylla and charybdis: on the one hand, making students comfortable even though they might learn less, while on the other hand, employing theoretically better pedagogical strategies, but perhaps making students uncomfortable in practice. Uncomfortable students are more likely to have their affective filters raised (Krashen, 1982) and thus learn less well in the long run. These themes of rapport, relationships and effective explanation draw attention to a tension between what is often perceived as the blanket advice, or imperative, to reduce TTT and a perceived contextual need to use more TTT.

ITE and CPD

There were two clear schools of thinking contrasting, for example, participant 5's view that students are 'primarily there to speak the language' and that teachers should limit their TTT accordingly. This view is in accordance with the approach advocated by ITE such as CELTA. Participant 5 explained that since there is a lot that students themselves can do to improve their language learning away from the classroom, his principal goal 'in the room' should be to support the development of their speaking skills. Participant 5 had been working as a Director of Studies and also commented that he sees teachers 'going on too long', remarking that teachers 'shouldn't be practising their English'. The second view, however, exemplified by

participant 4's comments on her training experiences (detailed below), suggests a tension between what some teachers have been trained to do and what they feel they should be doing and how their students want them to be.

ITE seems to play an important role in forming practitioners' views of TTT, with participant 3 describing her participation in a CELTA course after two years of practice as a 'turning point'. She said that CELTA had increased her awareness and made her consider her own use of TTT. She stated that she had been unaware of the proportion of time she spent talking during a lesson prior to doing this course. She said that consequently TTT is now always on her mind, especially when being observed. Similarly, CPD had a role to play for participant 2 who discussed the impact of the diagnostic lesson while doing DELTA module 2. Her trainer asked her to explain the purpose of a question she had asked and this made her think carefully about the purpose of her TTT.

While CPD can be explicit and active (attending conferences, doing further qualifications like DELTA or DipTESOL), it can also be implicit and passive. An example of the latter form of CPD was described by participant 5 who reflected midway through the interview that he does not 'know where [he] picked up some of these perspectives 'about needing to keep TTT minimal''. Then, later in the interview, he made the revealing comment that 'when [he] first came into teaching, the director had this idea that we would only teach grammar' and he, therefore, wondered if he had 'overreacted' to that perspective. Implicit institutional expectations, therefore, might be as powerful as explicit instruction and training.

Turning back to the survey data, when asked about whether TTT had been a topic during recent CPD, the results were very mixed. Just over one-third (39.1%) said they strongly disagreed and just under a third (30.4%) said they somewhat agreed. Thus, we can see that the picture is varied. During her interview, participant 3 recalled the CPD she participated in while working at a number of private language academies in Spain and said that while TTT had not been on the agenda, it should have been. She commented: 'CPD has been more focused on content, exam boards, as opposed to teaching philosophy based' and points out that teachers in Spain might come to the ELT classroom 'from other types of teaching' and so they

might assume they are expected to 'present content' which would lead to them using more TTT. She alluded here to the stereotypical image of a teacher: "the sage on the stage" engaging in "chalk and talk" while students listen and do exercises.

Participant 3 was in clear agreement with the advice to reduce TTT and felt that her formal training had helped her improve her practice. Participant 4, however, spoke at length about her recent CPD experience of doing DELTA module 2; an experience she described as 'traumatic, but [...] worth it'. She told us that she had needed to 'adapt [her] teaching to the Cambridge style. The very first thing was TTT'. While valuing the fact that the course had caused her to question 'everything' she did, she also talked about having to 'pretend to be another person' in order to pass the module. This raises interesting questions about teacher identity, autonomy and authenticity (and how this relates to teacher well-being) which are well beyond the scope of this paper. Very relevant here, however, are her comments about her preferred teaching style which uses what she recognises as too much TTT. Many students appreciate it and it results in a lesson that 'feels more like a conversation, like having a coffee' and she perceives that this atmosphere leads to greater trust from her students. However, she acknowledged that this response varies, with not all students appreciating her approach. She remarked that students from certain cultures have different expectations of how a lesson should be, and want far more TTT in a lecture-style lesson. This led to her adapting her practice somewhat.

Student expectations

Student expectations were also an interesting thread in the interviews. Participant 5, the Director of Studies at a private language academy in Spain, commented that 'we don't know what's going on at their school'. His overall point here was that student expectations are shaped by their experiences. Most of our educational experiences as students will be those we have during our obligatory schooling. Thus, how English (and indeed other subjects) is taught during our students' mandatory education will have an impact on how they expect to be taught in extracurricular settings or during post-mandatory education. If what teenage students currently experience in school is lots of gap fills, multiple choice exercises, teachers explaining grammar (possibly in L1), lots of TTT and very little target language production by students, then this is what they are likely to think that learning English is. Thus, they will expect something

similar from their extracurricular English class. Participant 5 reported on the students' responses to an intensive exam preparation course that he had designed. The course culminated with the students sitting the exam, so the stakes were high. The programme began, as planned, with low TTT but lots of student interaction and production to practise the language and prepare for the exam. The complaints soon started arriving at the school office: the students wanted less interaction, more TTT and more gap-fill exercises that they would complete in silence. Student expectations and student demands, especially in the private sector, are often more important than sound pedagogy. As a result of the complaints and on the instruction of the school director, participant 5 revised the course and gave the students what they had asked for.

Furthermore, participant 3 commented on the expectations of lower-level adult students who might have only experienced a more traditional teaching approach in school and are then suddenly confronted with the communicative approach in her classes. As a result, they are often shy and reluctant to participate, especially at first. This naturally results in more TTT at the start of the course, but she commented that she would always include at least one activity in each lesson which is the sole responsibility of the students, otherwise 'they will expect you and let you carry the class, and that should never be the case'. Meanwhile, Participant 2 is currently working with a lot of one-to-one students online and thus the dynamic is completely different in many ways, not least the quantity of both TTT and STT. Since in a one-to-one lesson the only person the student can communicate with is the teacher, there is an expectation that the teacher will talk a significant amount in order to be a good talk partner. We are reminded here of Grice's Maxims (1975) and specifically the maxim of quantity. Lessons are social encounters, after all, and a one-to-one lesson is effectively a conversation. It would be a very strange conversation and a very strange social experience if the teacher was consistently and artificially restricting her talk and violating the Gricean maxim for an hour. Participant 2 commented that in these lessons she is 'actually *talking*¹ to my students' and having genuine social interaction with them.

¹ Italics indicate the original emphasis in the interview.

Some students might discover that the communicative approach often employed in ELT settings and encouraged by CELTA and DELTA training, is a welcome change from their previous experiences in learning English and makes them more interested in learning. Others might want more TTT as a model in order to hear the language, but teachers should be cautious about being too attentive to students' demands that they talk more. Participant 3 recalled a group of adult business English students who would encourage her to increase her TTT to 'take advantage of the downtime'.

Conclusions

RQ 1: How do teachers view the amount of time they spend engaged in TTT?

Overall, the teachers who participated in this study can be said to be broadly unsure of how they feel about their TTT. They neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree with the proposition that they spend 'about their right amount of time talking during lessons'. They also neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree that they should speak less during lessons. On the other hand, no teacher agreed, strongly or otherwise, that they felt as though they should increase their TTT. The interview data support this conclusion, as even those teachers who acknowledged that they spoke a lot during lessons and were happy with that had no intention of increasing their TTT further.

While those survey participants who mentioned that they thought quality TTT was more important than worrying about the quantity of TTT were no more or less happy than those who did not mention and justify their perceived need to talk more at times. They were, however, more likely to have more experience and to be better qualified. What this suggests is that teachers with less experience and perhaps only their ITE qualification are more likely to be concerned with the amount of TTT in which they engage.

RQ 2: What influences have contributed to the way teachers view their own TTT?

Many teachers feel a pressure to speak less, citing training courses such as CELTA and DELTA, as formative in promoting the view that less TTT is better. Participant 8,

who is currently training to be a CELTA trainer, remarked that TTT is often seen as synonymous with something negative. Others refer to the principles of the communicative approach, which is the methodology of the institution at which they work. Although all teachers reflected on the quantity of their TTT, the quality of what they said was not explicitly addressed in their remarks save for the free-text comment on the survey written by interview participant 2. Some teachers recognised that there were times when speaking more (or less) might be desirable, and participant 1 differentiated types of talk, but only one anchored those thoughts in the question of the quality of the talk. This suggests that, unlike quantity, TTT quality is not explicitly present in the thoughts of the participants. Thus, this paper agrees with Walsh (2002) that ITE should guide trainee teachers in thinking about, analysing and planning for quality TTT in lessons. Going further, perhaps measuring QTT (Quality Teacher Talk) would be a better metric than TTT to help trainees and early career teachers (ECT) improve their practice. Defining QTT is a more nuanced discussion than timing the amount a teacher is speaking during a lesson, but this nuanced debate is necessary if we want to improve pedagogical outcomes.

For participant 7, more than training courses, institutional guidelines and comments from other teachers, her students are the most influential factor in her TTT. Perhaps, the best course of action for individual practitioners to take on their own is to listen to and observe their students. A teacher working with established routines is best placed to know if they need to extend an explanation or if the group can understand with minimal instructions.

What are the implications for practice? What are the implications for in-service CPD?

It seems that while more than half of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that they 'spend about the right amount of time talking in lessons', when talking with the interviewees there is a lot of uncertainty about what the right amount of time looks like. CELTA and DELTA make their pedagogical position very clear with the result that TTT has become almost a dirty word in ELT; participant 8 referred to the 'stigma' of TTT. Being clear about theoretical ideas does not always correlate well with practice. Practitioners work with human beings in classrooms and taking a clinical approach to TTT can be difficult or even undesirable in many contexts. Like

the interviewees themselves, this paper has returned repeatedly to this tension between a theoretical imperative to reduce TTT and the desire or need to talk more in practice.

None of the participants were advocating that increased TTT is a good thing, but many seemed uncomfortable with this tension. This paper's authors are concerned at the sense of discomfort and unease about TTT which has been uncovered while doing this research. Uncomfortable teachers are practitioners who, on one hand, are not able to give their best to their students. On the other hand, this is also a question of well-being. Not captured in the data is the sense of guilt perceived by one of the authors as some of the participants talked about talking (too much) in lessons.

It is suggested, therefore, that institutions talk to their teachers about TTT. One approach, especially applicable in larger organisations, would be an anonymous survey like the one employed in the research for this paper. Anonymity would permit employees to offer heterodox views or safely express discomfort. Having gathered the views of their teaching staff, institutions are then better placed to consider the next steps. Such steps would, on one hand, ensure teachers are working within the methodology promoted by the organisation, while on the other hand, ensuring that teachers are not made uncomfortable by their perceptions of their own TTT.

In addition, it is recommended that TTT be covered in internal CPD sessions. ECTs may be unaware of their own proportion of TTT and its impact on lessons and student production of language. Others may be aware of the orthodox view on minimising TTT, perhaps from ITE or their employer's policy documents, and actively pursue this goal while remaining unaware of the reasons behind it. Indeed, they may pursue this goal in a sub-optimal way, sacrificing quality for reduced quantity. This leads to the third point that high-quality and well-structured CPD can address the difference between quality and quantity and how this relates to TTT.

Considerations for further research

The nature of our data gathering means that we have a wide variety of teachers and experiences represented in the sample. On the one hand, this can be seen as a strength as it provides a breadth of data that would have been impossible had the sample been drawn more locally or with more specific parameters. However, the experiences of an international sample of this size have obvious limitations in that we cannot draw out universal implications. An initial first step in further research would be to replicate the study but with a larger sample to interrogate how reliable these findings are. However, an alternative approach for further research would be to consider, for example, one training route in the ELT classroom and how graduates from that route feel about TTT at a variety of points after finishing ITE. Another potential project would replicate this study on a more local level, perhaps within a city, state or country, as cultural factors may play a role in how teachers and trainers perceive and reflect upon their teacher talking time. Teacher well-being is increasingly being researched and this is a welcome development. Given the stigma attached to TTT, we consider it essential to understand how practitioners feel about this topic in order to better support their practice.

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Appendix One: Survey Statements

1. Teacher talk has been mentioned as an area for me to work on in observation feedback
2. Minimising teacher talking time was a topic on my initial teacher education course
3. Teacher talk is/has been mentioned as a strength of my practice in observation feedback
4. Minimising teacher talking time was a topic during recent CPD I have attended
5. I feel as though I spend about the right amount of time talking during lessons
6. I think I should talk less during lessons
7. I think I should speak more during lessons
8. I think there are times when it might be necessary for me to speak more, but feel like I shouldn't
9. There are times when I feel I'm talking too much during lessons, but I need to do so to be clear

Appendix Two: Interview Questions

1. How do you feel, in general, about the amount of time you spend talking in lessons?
2. What do you think influences your ideas about TTT?
3. Has TTT been mentioned in observation feedback or been a topic during in-service CPD?
4. Have you received any criticism/suggestions/compliments regarding your teacher talk from your students? How do you think they perceive your amount of teacher talk?
5. Provide examples of feedback you have received regarding teacher talk. Which one(s) were the most meaningful or frustrating. Why?

Further questions to elicit if there are moments when they feel they should talk more/less, to be used only if necessary

- a) Why should you talk more/less?
- b) How would your students benefit most from your increase/decrease in teacher talk?
- c) What steps should you take to achieve that amount of teacher talk?