

## ECHOES FROM TEACHER DISCOURSE: AN INSIDE-OUT PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

Researchers in teacher education have paid increasing attention to teacher reflectivity and its relevance for teaching/learning practices. However, to our knowledge, there has been no investigation of teacher reflectivity from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In this paper we draw mainly on SFL to examine aspects of the relationship between teachers and learners as construed in self-evaluative reports written by 4 Brazilian teacher-trainees. These reports – self-reflections on the trainees' own teaching practices – were collected as part of work developed in a *Teaching Practicum* Course taken by these trainees. In addition to SFL, in our discussion of results we also draw on research related to teacher education/reflectivity (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Richards & Lockart, 1996). The linguistic structures described and interpreted in order to unravel the roles these trainees ascribe to themselves and their students reveal a self-centered positioning of the trainees as social participants whose practices are shaped by conceptions traditionally established by a culture of schooling which maintains the emphasis of teaching on the transmission of

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knowledge. Results also reveal asymmetry between teachers and students inasmuch as the latter are construed as playing a secondary role, with little responsibility in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language. The study may contribute to enhance the search for awareness of contrasts between new views of language teaching/learning and traditional perceptions such as the ones conveyed in the reports analyzed.

**Keywords:** teacher discourse, reflectivity, self-evaluative reports, language teaching/learning, SFL.

## 1. Introduction

Social groups usually share values mediated by complex processes of interaction within their social environment. Besides being the basis of people's attitudes and beliefs, values also exert powerful influence over people's behavior<sup>1</sup>. The nature of the role relationship between teachers and learners, for example, is equally affected by the attitudes and beliefs that the former have towards the latter and vice-versa, thus representing an important aspect of the psychological 'baggage' both teachers and students bring to social encounters such as the classroom.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role relationship between teachers and learners as perceived by 4 teacher-trainees as they critically and reflectively evaluate their teaching practice<sup>2</sup>. Although it is clear that different and complex factors influence the roles that teachers and learners play in the classroom, an appreciation of these roles is essential for us to further understand the teaching/learning process.

Within this perspective, this study finds support in Halliday's (1985/1994) systemic functional linguistics (SFL). We share with Halliday the view of language as 'a complex semiotic system' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 27) used to encode representations of aspects of the world, which contain traces of how people see 'reality'. Moreover, in our discussion of results, we also draw on research related to teacher education (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

The research questions that guided our work are: How do the trainees see the roles of the social participants (teacher-trainee and students) in the FL classroom? Is it possible to detect asymmetry through

the subjects' roles in the teacher/students relationship? How are these social participants and possible asymmetries construed in language?

## 2. The study

The teacher-trainees involved in the present study – 1 female and 3 male, their ages ranging from 22 to 25 – were four undergraduate students of English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) enrolled in 'Curso de Letras'<sup>3</sup> at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), in Florianópolis, Brazil. They were taking the obligatory *Teaching Practicum*, a course to provide teacher-trainees the pedagogic background for their future professional career as teachers. None of them had previous teaching experience before starting the *Teaching Practicum*.

The schools and groups where the teacher-trainees carried out their teaching were selected according to time availability of both teacher-trainees and their supervisor. These schools are public institutions whose students come primarily from lower socio-economic classes.

The data for this study are self-evaluative reports written in Portuguese by the four EFL teacher-learners throughout one academic semester (from March 1999 to July 1999), about the classes they themselves taught during the *Teaching Practicum*. No constraints on length or time were imposed. The corpus consists of 28 reports, 3 subjects having produced 8 reports each and one having produced 4 only. The data used in this study were thus not produced for the sake of research, but rather were built out of naturally occurring classroom events as an obligatory assignment for the *Teaching Practicum*.

When this study was carried out the *Teaching Practicum* was a 108-hour course, divided into two moments, which takes place at the very last semester of 'Curso de Letras' – EFL Program<sup>4</sup>. The first moment of the course occurs when teacher-learners go to a primary or secondary school and attend classes of an experienced teacher (the regular teacher of the group). In the second moment, the teacher-trainees start their

own teaching practices, and the regular teacher of the group attends these lessons. At this point, the teacher-supervisor of these students also attends their lessons so as to evaluate and help them in their subsequent reflection on their teaching.

Such help is characterized by comments (of praise or criticism) on aspects that, in the supervisor's point of view, deserve attention. Both moments (of observation and of teaching) are followed by written reports in which the teacher-learners critically comment on the lessons they either attend or teach. The present research addresses the reports derived from the second moment (trainees' reflections on their teaching practices).

Using Halliday's systemic functional grammar (1985, 1994) as the main theoretical foundation for the analysis, we discuss the teacher-trainees' texts from the experiential perspective, i.e. their lexicogrammatical representation of how they experience the learning/teaching world around their *Teaching Practicum*. More specifically, we focus on the system of transitivity in order to examine the roles the subjects depict for themselves and for the students. Although we do not investigate interpersonal meanings from the SFL perspective of the lexicogrammatical systems of mood and modality, we do attempt to establish – based on the transitivity analysis of roles – how the trainees portray the relationship between them and the students.

### **3. Transitivity: clause as representation**

Transitivity structures make up the functional configuration of the clause as representation realized through processes (verbs), participants (nouns) and circumstances (prepositional phrases of time, manner, place, etc.). Processes are encoded in verbal groups, which encapsulate the 'goings on' portrayed in the clauses (Halliday, 1994). The participants are the entities involved in each one of the process. Circumstances, which are beyond the scope of the present work, are more marginal than participants, being usually concerned with setting, temporal and physical matters (Bloor & Bloor, 1995). An interesting

way of looking at the representational metafunction of the clause is as a 'figure' or a 'quantum' of information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), as if our representations by means of processes, participants and circumstances could somehow be pictured or quantified. As a text develops, every clause instantiates a new 'quantum' of 'reality'.

Based on Halliday's transitivity system, Martin et al (1997) distinguish three fields of experience in language: the field of doings and happenings (material processes), the field of consciousness, represented both internally (mental processes) and externally (verbal processes), and the field of being and having (relational processes). We thus end up with four main process types, which are described along the following lines.

Material processes are processes of doing and happening. They construe actions that are usually, but not necessarily, concrete. Actions, as Eggins (2004) points out, presuppose an Actor, the entity that performs the action. Some processes also have a second participant named Goal, meaning the entity that suffers or undergoes the action. One further participant that may occur in a material clause is the Beneficiary, a participant benefiting from the doing.

Mental processes or processes of sensing encode meanings with respect to feeling, thinking and perceiving. Halliday (1994) divides mental processes into three classes: affection (liking, fearing), cognition (thinking, knowing, understanding) and perception (seeing, hearing)<sup>5</sup>. These processes have two inherent participants: *Senser*, the one who feels, thinks or perceives; and *Phenomenon*, the one that is felt, thought or perceived. There will always be these two nominal-type participants associated with any mental process. Even if one is apparently absent, it has to be retrieved from the context so that one can make sense of the clause.

Verbal processes are processes of verbal action, of saying. Prototypically, verbal clauses have three participants: *Sayer*, *Receiver* and *Verbiage*. The *Sayer* is the participant responsible for the process, it is the one who says, states, tells, informs, asks, demands, commands, offers, suggests and so on. The *Receiver* is the one to whom the process

is directed. The Verbiage corresponds to what is said, which can be either the content of what is said or the name of the saying. Verbal processes project clauses by either quoting or reporting speech. In these cases, according to Halliday (1994), the saying does not represent the Verbiage and, as such, does not figure in the process as a participant. Rather, it is a projected clause that is not part of the verbal process.

Relational processes are processes of being. As Halliday (1994: 119) puts it, "as the term 'relational' suggests, this is not 'being' in the sense of existing. ... In relational clauses, there are two parts to the 'being': something is being said to 'be' something else. In other words, a relation is being set up between two separate entities".

The present investigation concerns how trainees lexicogrammatically construe actions, happenings, feelings, beliefs, situations, and states that involve their own participation and that of their students'. By examining these lexicogrammatical realizations we will pursue answers to the questions posed in the introduction of this paper.

#### 4. Procedures for analyzing transitivity

To compile the data, we began by scanning the trainees' 28 self-evaluative reports. The texts were then divided into clauses, which, in functional grammar, are considered the basic unit of analysis in their role as 'figure' or 'quantum' of information, as mentioned earlier. Next, this universe was trimmed to clauses containing processes into which the trainees and/or their students are inscribed as participants taking the role of *-er*, a term coined by Hasan (1989) as a way to generalize Actor, Senser, Sayer and Carrier into one category.

The investigation concentrated on: i) the initiating and continuing clauses in paratactic clause complex relations such as<sup>6</sup> '*Calibrar minha fala sempre foi uma preocupação em sala, mas acredito que não foi um problema em nenhum momento*' (*Adjusting my talk has always been a concern in class, but I believe that it has not been a problem at any moment*); ii) the dominant and dependent clauses in hypotactic relations such as '*exigi a eles que copiassem aquelas informações*' (*I demanded*

*that they copied the information*). The analyses of these clauses were thus as follows.

(i)

Calibrar (Adjusting)	minha fala (my talk)
<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>GOAL</b>

sempre (always)	foi (has been)	uma preocupação (a concern)	em sala (in class)
	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>CIRC.</b>

mas (but)	(eu)  (I)	acredito (believe)	que não foi um problema em nenhum momento that it has not been a problem at any moment
	<b>SENSE</b>	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>PHENOMENON</b>

(ii)

(eu)  (I)	exigi (demanded)	a eles (from them)	que copiassem aquelas informações (that they copied the information)
<b>SAYER</b>	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>RECEIVER</b>	<b>PROJECTED CLAUSE</b>

For the purposes of the present research, we disregarded embedded and projected clauses, and considered them as rank-shifted participants. For example, the embedded clause '*as informações que os alunos me forneceram*' (*the information the students provided me with*), in '*Por outro lado, em algumas vezes, não aproveitei da melhor forma as informações que os alunos me forneceram*' (*On the other hand, I did not take the best advantage of the information the students provided me with*) was considered Goal in a material process; and the projected clause '*eu gostaria de ter agradecido a ajuda inconsciente que todos (os alunos) propiciaram a meu*

***futuro profissional (I would like to have thanked the unconscious help that all of them provided for my professional future)*** was considered Phenomenon in a mental process, as displayed below.

Por outro lado (On the other hand)	em algumas vezes (sometimes)	(eu) (I)	não aproveitei (didn't take)	da melhor forma (the best advantage)	as informações que os alunos me forneceram (of the information the students provided me with)
	<b>CIRCUMSTANCE</b>	<b>ACTOR</b>	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>CIRCUMSTANCE</b>	<b>GOAL</b>

(eu) (I)	gostaria (would like)	de ter agradecido a ajuda inconsciente que todos propiciaram a meu futuro profissional. ( <i>to have thanked the unconscious help that all of them provided for my professional future</i> )
<b>SENSE</b>	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>PHENOMENON</b>

Having narrowed down the data to clauses into which the trainees and their students are participants, we grouped them under the four main process types (material, mental, verbal and relational). The following step consisted in pursuing both a quantitative<sup>7</sup> and a qualitative analysis of the systemic choices made by the subjects in their texts. As part of the qualitative analysis, we interpreted and evaluated the linguistic structures and attempted to unravel the roles that the social participants depict for themselves when reporting on their acting out in the foreign language classroom. Having analyzed roles, we were then able to figure whether there was asymmetry in the relationship between trainees and their students as seen from the trainees' perspectives.



## **5. Analyzing transitivity**

Altogether, a total of 533 clauses were analyzed for the purposes of investigating transitivity patterns within the corpus. Material processes represented the majority with 245 processes (45.96%), followed by 122 mental (22.88%), 108 verbal (20.26%) and 58 relational processes (10.88%). As Halliday (1994) points out, although counting cannot constitute the only element for analysis, interpretation and evaluation of text, numerical data on language may be significant, and figures and frequency patterns may be helpful.

The numerical results were examined within this perspective, and thus a close analysis of the process types into which each subject inscribed her/himself and the other social participants in their reports was essential to shed light on the nature of each subject's roles, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. Interestingly, instead of holding their own (individual) way of seeing the process of teaching/learning an FL, the subjects reveal to share a similar view of the foreign language classroom. With a few differences, important though, they all tend to report their teaching of conventional lessons, mainly focused on themselves as teachers. Their students are represented as playing a side role, usually construed as having little or no responsibility in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language, as if their participation were not of primary importance to their own. In the next four sub-sections, we proceed with the analysis regarding each one of the process types and respective participants, privileging a qualitative perspective.

### *5.1 Acting in the FL classroom*

As shown in Table 1, 245 of the processes in the trainees' reports were material ones, corresponding to 45.96% of the 533 clauses in which they represented themselves and their students. The results thus reveal that the trainees are depicted as highly concerned with the actions taking place in the classroom, also suggesting that they may consider actions

and happenings as starting points for a motivating, interesting and participative environment.

Considering that actions normally involve reactions, i.e., one part (in this case, either trainee or students) acts and the other (again either trainee or students) acts back, a positive picture is captured through the trainees' preoccupation with the goings-on in the classroom. However, some features of the subjects' semiotization of their practices must be highlighted and this first sight impression must be revisited.

The Actors of the actions performed in the classroom, as represented by the teacher- trainees, are mainly the trainees themselves, as in ...*entrei (trainee) um pouco agitada em sala...* (*I (trainee) entered in class a bit disturbed*) or in ...*dei (trainee) continuidade à explicação...* (*I (trainee) gave continuity to the explanation*), adding to a total of 168 clauses (68.57% of the material processes) (Table 1). The other 76 material clauses, which means 31.02%, portray the students as the main participant of the processes, as in *Os alunos resolveram suas atividades* (*The students solved their tasks*). The comparison of these two percentages indicates that the trainees consider themselves more frequently as social participants and that they see themselves as the most important actors in the classroom, placing the students in a secondary position.

Additionally, when both the trainees and the students are portrayed as acting, they typically act upon inanimate Goals, as in ...*usei expressões de linguagem não trabalhadas com os alunos em sala* (*I used language expressions not worked with the students in class*). In fact, they most frequently control the entities that belong to their previous planning of lessons. The elements they affect are time, as in ...*(eu) cêdo 10 minutos da aula...* (*I give 10 minutes of my class*); the roll call, as in ...*quando eu terminasse a chamada...* (*when I finished the roll call*) and the activities they have planned for the class, such as in ...*e dei continuidade à explicação conforme o procedimento da aula* (*I gave continuity to the explanation according to the planning of the class*). Table 1 offers a panoramic view of the subjects' selection of participant roles together with the Goals that are affected by their own and the students' actions.

**Table 1 - Subjects' selection of participant roles**

MATERIAL PROCESSES = 245				
Trainee as Actor	Affecting inanimate Goal	Not affecting Goal	Affecting the students	Affecting the trainee
168 = 68.57%	130 = 77,38%	15 = 8,92%	18 = 10,71%	5 = 2,97%
Students as Actor	Affecting inanimate Goal	Not affecting Goal	Affecting the students	Affecting the trainee
77 = 31.42%	43 = 55,84%	26 = 33,76%	3 = 3,89%	5 = 6,49%

The idea of actions followed by reactions thus seems to fall apart. It appears that trainees and students do not cooperate in the classroom setting, as one would expect to happen.

### 5.2 Sensing in the FL classroom

The corpus presents a total of 122 mental processes, constituting the second type of process the trainees favor in their reports. Comparing this number to the 533 clauses analyzed, mental processes represent 22.88% of the clauses in which the trainees inscribe themselves and their students. Overall, the trainees appear to have granted to mental activities an important value throughout their representations, which sounds positive from a pedagogic perspective, since these activities are of vital significance in processes of cognition involved in teaching/learning a foreign language.

Again, as it happens with the trainees' use of material processes, they represent themselves as the ones who most frequently sense, i.e., typically, they are the Senser, as in *Eu ficava pensando em maneiras de ensinar números ordinais aos alunos (I thought of ways to teach ordinal numbers to the students)* or in *...observei se todos haviam copiado... (I observed whether all the students had copied)*. On the whole, the trainees embody 93 sensings (76.22%), and the students 29 (23.77%). The percentages show that, in the trainees' construal of the FL classroom, their students – in addition to acting less, as discussed in the previous section – also think, feel and perceive less, reinforcing the

idea that the trainees construe themselves as more outstanding participants than the students in the sense that they dominate the goings on in the classroom.

Considering that the teacher-trainees are more frequently realized as Senser than the students, we interpreted these results as an evidence that they (the trainees) represent themselves as more thoughtful than their students – ...*após (eu) pensar sobre o primeiro dia de estágio...* (after thinking (**trainee**) about the first day of my practicum), ...(*trainee*) **sentí** uma certa resistência...(*I felt a certain resistance*) and ... **observei** se todos haviam copiado...(*I observed whether all the students had copied*). Nevertheless, as can be seen in Table 2, within the processes in which the students are ascribed the role of Senser, they are represented as more frequently making cognitions (65.51%) than the trainees (39.78%). Interestingly though, most of these cognition processes are negated, as in ...*muitos deles (students) não sabiam distinguir o que era diferença e similaridade mesmo em português* (many of them (the students) **did not know** how to distinguish differences from similarities even in Portuguese) or in *os alunos ficaram sem entender o que elas (algumas palavras) significavam...* (the students remained **without understanding** their (some words) meanings...).

**Table 2 - Subjects' selection of participant roles**

MENTAL PROCESSES = 122			
Trainee as Senser	Cognition	Affection	Perception
93 = 76.22%	37 = 39.78%	18 = 19.35%	38 = 40.86%
Students as Senser	Cognition	Affection	Perception
29 = 23.77%	19 = 65.51%	5 = 17.24%	5 = 17.24%

As for the students' sensings that are not negated, most often they comprise perceptions – *Os alunos perceberam a minha falta de segurança...* (The students **noticed** my lack of confidence) – and

feelings – ...o aluno em sua carteira **sentiria-se** menos à mostra... (the student in his seat would **feel** less exposed). In contrast to what would be expected from learners in terms of being active participants in the process of learning, the students' participation in class does not echo in the trainees' reports. The way they represent learners does not picture the students' success in exercising their minds to think or hypothesize about how language works or how one goes about learning a language, for example.

### 5.3 *Saying in the FL classroom*

As a way to continue investigating representations of 'classroom realities' discursively created by the trainees in their evaluative reports, we now analyze verbal processes, of which there are 108 instantiations. This third type of process favored by the trainees represents 20.26% of the 533 clauses examined, a number not distant from the 22.88% of mental processes, allowing us to interpret that, from the trainees' point of view, these two types of processes are similar in terms of relevance. It seems that the trainees construe in their reports an intimate relation between mental and verbal activities as being mutually constitutive in the sense that interacting presupposes thinking, and thinking both presupposes and is facilitated by interaction. Notwithstanding, as the results reveal a lower overall percentage of occurrences – as compared to material processes – they also reinforce that interacting in the classroom is not outstanding, as opposed to acting.

Similar to in their use of material and mental processes, the trainees represent themselves as the ones who most often produce verbal processes in the FL classroom. They are Sayers in 65 (60.18%) occurrences of the verbal processes, while the students are ascribed this role in 43 (39.81%) (Table 3). Once again, the trainees assume a self-centered stance, foregrounding their role of leaders and controllers in the classroom, and portraying themselves as more prominent participants if compared to the learners, as further evidenced below.

The trainees' reported interaction in their classes is typically based upon questions raised by themselves (the ones who initiate

most of the communication within the classroom). Few answers are reported to be given by the students, and yet trainees do not report themselves as reacting to these answers. As reiterated in the lowest percentages in Table 3, direct interaction among the students and between students and teachers – represented in the trainees' reports – does not occur often since students as Sayer only occasionally co-occur with students or trainees as Receiver and vice-versa. Furthermore, as can also be seen in Table 3, the verbal processes used in the reports usually present no Receiver.

**Table 3 - Subjects' selection of participant roles**

VERBAL PROCESSES = 108			
Trainee as Sayer	Students as Receiver	Trainee as Receiver	No Receiver
65 = 61.18%	20 = 30.76%	0	45 = 69.23%
Students as Sayer	Students as Receiver	Trainee as Receiver	No Receiver
43 = 39.81%	5 = 11.62%	4 = 9.30%	34 = 79.06%

In fact, lessons are portrayed by the trainees as being quite traditional in the sense that, as teachers, they explain the subject-matter/activities – ...*explico* que não é este o objetivo dos cartazes...(...*I explain* that this is not the objective of the posters...), they check the students' understanding – ...*pergunto* se todos entenderam...(...*I ask* if everybody has understood...), they ask questions – ...*perguntei* a ele o que era para ser feito na atividade... (...*I asked* him what was to be done in the activity...), they write things on the board for the students to copy, give commands – ...*determinei* que todos copiassem (...*I determined* that they all copied), and require students to find information in texts – ...*sugeri* que os mesmos deveriam fazer todas as atividades a partir das informações dos textos...(...*I suggested* that they should do the activities according to the information in the texts...). In short, the teacher is reported as the authority in the classroom,

while the students are supposed to comply with her/his demands in order to 'learn what she/he knows' which she/he intends to teach.

#### 5.4 *Attributing features in the FL classroom*

Relational processes are the ones least frequently used by the trainees, with only 58 occurrences, representing a percentage of 10.88% of the total number of clauses analyzed (533). Here, we labeled all main participants of the clauses under the name of Carrier and we evaluated their Attribute as positive, negative or neutral.

Corroborating the trainees' previous tendency to place themselves in a more remarkable position in relation to the students, the subjects, with one exception, report on their attributes more frequently than they do on the students'. Even though this time the numbers do not differ in the same proportion as they do in the use of the other processes, the trainees represent themselves as Carriers in 32 (55.17%) instantiations, as in *(Eu) estava bem mais segura e confiante... (I was much safer and confident...)*, and the students in 26 (44.82%), as in *Isto feito, não tornou-se (um determinado aluno) mais indesejável para com a turma (After that, (a student) was no longer unpleasant to the group)*. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 4, the students are attributed negative or neutral qualities slightly more frequently than positive ones, as in *...os alunos não estavam conseguindo associar... (...the students were not able to associate...)* or in *...mas eles (the students) continuaram desinteressados fazendo muito barulho e... (...but they (students) remained uninterested making a lot of noise and...)*, while the trainees are more often qualified positively than negatively, as in *...estive (trainee) atento à dicção, ritmo e tom de voz (...I was attentive to diction, rhythm and ...)* or in *...tenho (trainee) segurança no que estou fazendo (...I have confidence in what I am doing)*.

**Table 4 - Subjects' selection of participant roles**

RELATIONAL PROCESSES = 58			
Trainees as Carrier	Positively qualified	Negatively qualified	Neutrally qualified
32 = 55.17%	20 = 62.50%	12 = 37.50%	0
Students as Carrier	Positively qualified	Negatively qualified	Neutrally qualified
26 = 44.82%	12 = 46.15%	10 = 38.46%	4 = 15.38%

Overall, the results suggest that the view of the classroom that the trainees construe in terms of relational processes, as represented through the way they portray themselves and the students, fits the general pattern, though in a less salient way, of foregrounding their own participation.

## **6. Roles and relations of the social participants in the FL classroom**

The transitivity patterns emerging in the reports seem to favor a self-centered positioning of the trainees as social participants whose practices are shaped by conceptions traditionally established by a culture of schooling which maintains the emphasis of teaching on the transmission of knowledge. The teacher, in this view, teaches the content of his/her lesson, while the students are supposed to hear it and assimilate it as unquestionable truth. The linguistic structures evaluated and interpreted in order to unravel the roles trainees designate to the social participants in the FL classroom reveal the maintenance of asymmetry between teachers and students: these teacher-trainees construe themselves as the ones who most often act, communicate and reflect in the teaching/learning environment. The fact that they often take the -er role<sup>8</sup> and do not inscribe their students into -ed roles, thus not extending their actions, sayings and reflections to these students seems to reinforce their self-centeredness.

The trainees' reports do not resemble a view of learning as seen, for instance, in Ellis (1997) where learning a language is a



distinctively human social activity whose major features are interaction, collaboration and negotiation. Developing motivation, interest and participation involves the students in doing things, in speaking, in negotiating meaning, in expressing their feelings, in having responsibilities and in sharing experiences, among other attitudes and forms of interaction. Within this perspective, the social climate of the classroom and consequent predisposition for teaching and learning collaboratively is a result of a combination of the level and quality of teachers' and learners' involvement in the day-by-day of the classroom (Wright, 1987).

Although in new methods of FL teaching there has been a movement away from teacher-dominated modes to more learner-centered approaches, such methods still require teachers to carry out particular roles in the classroom in order to facilitate the language acquisition process of the students, as observed by Richards & Lockart (1996). Nevertheless, trainees in the present study do not appear to have internalized that communicative lessons presuppose higher degree of involvement of the students in class.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

Making use of principles and method of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), we have tried to delineate four teacher-trainees' construals of themselves and of their students in the patterns emerging from these trainees' transitivity choices when modeling their view of the role relationships between teachers and students within the classroom. Overall, the results suggest that the trainees hold a traditional view of the classroom environment: they focus on themselves as the ones who have knowledge and whose role is to transmit it to their students, while the students are supposed to pay attention to them, answer their questions and ask their permission to do things.

The limited investigation carried out here supports Matthiessen's (1999) assumption that, in a systemic-based theory of transitivity, there

is the hypothesis that frequency of instantiation will correlate with the qualitative nature of these systemic options. As already stated, the results of the quantitative and the qualitative analyses matched in the sense that teacher-trainees tended to foreground their participation in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language, representing their role as more salient than that of the students. As portrayed in the trainees' reports, there was thus an inherent asymmetry of roles.

The most outstanding picture we get from the investigation carried out here is perhaps that the subjects are to a great extent helpless and powerless inasmuch as the transitivity processes in which they inscribe themselves depict them as not directly affecting animate entities, revealing their ineffectiveness in acting upon the reality of the FL classroom.

Corroborating the literature that views linguistic form as a realization of social meaning (e.g., Halliday, 1985/1994; Hasan, 1989, Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, Meurer, 2004), the language analyzed in this paper brings further evidence that linguistic and social structures are strongly interconnected. This study suggests that although the trainees may have prepared lessons according to modern methodologies of language teaching which propose that students play an active role in the classroom, the role relationships established by the language they use in their reports are mainly influenced by the social roles that teachers and students have traditionally played.

## Notes

1. This phenomenon might be explained in terms of the second author's (Meurer, 2004, 2006) elaborations on structuration theory, in which he argues that significations – which would include values – have structuring properties, and thus influence human behavior and action. However, this theoretical perspective will not be pursued here.
2. Even though studies on teacher reflection branch into more than one theoretical perspective, one could say that, overall, this area of research is interested in investigating how teachers reflect on their practices and how this reflection may

influence the way they proceed in their careers as language professionals. Reflection has the potential to help teacher-learners to make explicit for themselves what their values and beliefs regarding the process of foreign language teaching are, thus helping them in their ongoing professional development (Bailey et al, 1996; Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

3. A university degree in a 'Curso de Letras', in Brazil, corresponds to a university degree in TEFL / TESOL.
4. New legislation demands 400 hours subdivided into the several semesters of undergraduate credit-work.
5. Although we are aware that Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) have added *desiderative* as a further category of mental processes to encompass volition verbs such as *want* and *wish*, we analyzed our data following Halliday's 1994 edition.
6. We provide glosses in English for all the examples cited of the data, which as already specified were in Portuguese. For these first examples, please see also the boxes below for glosses in English.
7. As the quantitative analysis was only used as basis for the qualitative one, we used overall percentages, which sometimes do not add to 100% as a total.
8. -er, as already introduced in section 4, and -ed are terms coined by Hasan (1989) as a way to respectively generalize Actor, Senser, Sayer and Carrier into one category, and Goal, Phenomenon, Receiver and Attribute into another.

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