

Arno Bellack set out to analyze lessons as they happened in a classroom. His framework conceived of a lesson as a language game with its own rules. All exchanges are language games, in that they have a structure and a set of rules that permit people to understand what is transpiring. The telling of "a joke" is a particular language game, the basic rule of which is that the punch line must come at the end of the speaker's "telling."

Similarly, lessons are language games in which people make functional moves: they say things that relate to other parts of the exchange. Bellack observed that in the language game called teaching there are 2 related sets of moves that the teacher and the students use to conduct a lesson.

Two moves are initiatory; that is, they are used to move the lesson/game forward. The first of the two initiatory moves is the Structuring move, a move that sets the boundaries and/or context for the lesson, and the second initiatory move is the Soliciting move, which presents an expectation for other players in the game.

The other set of 2 moves is reflexive; that is, they reflect back to a previous move. The first reflexive move is a Responsive move. This move is intended to meet the expectation presented in a soliciting move, for example, the answer to a previous question. The second reflexive move is a Reacting move; that is, a language move that looks back to a previous move, but has not been not explicitly solicited or called for, such as when the teacher says to a student after a responding move "Yes, that is correct."

Thus, the classroom language game is composed of 4 moves:  
2 Initiatory = 1. Structuring Move -- sets context, boundaries  
2. Soliciting Move -- makes expectation known  
2 Reflexive = 3. Responsive Move -- intended to meet expectation  
4. Reacting Move-- not explicitly called for

The basic design of a traditional lesson is simply a series of soliciting/responding cycles. In every day terms, the teacher asks a question [makes a soliciting move:SOL] and a student responds [makes a responding move:RES], followed by another teacher question [SOL] and a student response [RES]. As was true with the US lesson we observed, there was no initial structuring move that announced the context or the boundaries for the Sol/Res cycles. The Asian lessons did not follow this design. We can, however, use the notion of language game and the functional moves as a way of talking about lesson designs. See forum on design of Asian lessons.

---