

ITA Transcripts

- Title:** Theoretical and Applied Mechanics 150/152, Introduction to Statics
- Focus:** The striking thing about this transcript is the negotiation between the TA and the students as they try to determine how to best use their class time. There are several instances of checking questions, i.e.: "is that what you want?" "is that what you're doing?" There is also some use of indirectness on the part of the students. For instance, several statements should be interpreted as requests or questions.
- Contributed by:** Jill Knutson and Dean Papajohn, University of Illinois
- Recording Date:** November 19, 1998
- Publisher:** TESOL
- Context:** The TA is an Asian woman. In this 4-minute exchange, students and the TA negotiate which problem the TA should work through. Students have had difficulty with problem number 199, but the TA cannot demonstrate that problem (probably because it is part of the homework). So the students and TA search for a problem similar to number 199. Through negotiation, they finally decide to amend another problem to serve their purposes.

1 T: we can do (3.0) the third problem 5.201.
2 (2.0)
3 this is just a direct application of those formula.
4 S1: is that like 5.199? [will you be doing] the same
5 thing?
6 T: it's not very like but uh if you look at the 5.202.
7 the diagram is similar kind to this one also.
8 but I think it-
9 S1: [the other night] I tried to go through 199 like you
10 did in class you even like gave us hints and I still
11 couldn't figure it out.
12 S2: I couldn't either
13 S1: [so . . .]
14 S2: [
15 T: I think there is no (1.0) other problem similar to
16 these two. sim- similar to the first just um 201
17 to- to- a little bit easier than the first of [hh] ne
18 [*T smiles and looks toward Ss*]
19 but we can certainly- do 202=it's more- close to the

20 first one. ok?
21 S2: what about 205?
22 T: 205? (10.0) [*T finds problem and reads it silently*]
23 ok. if we use 205 the equation is given us right?
24 have you look at 205?
25 S?: []
26 T: 205. the diagram is similar to 199 (0.5) and the
27 integrated equation y is given to us. it's two
28 constants. and the q : is given to us as a:
29 constant 700 L B. so.
30 (1.0)
31 now we only need to use boundary conditions to
32 determine C.
33 (0.8)
34 C1 and C3.
35 (8.0) [*T looks up at students (3.0), then down at*
36 *book, up at students again, down at book, then up at*
37 *students again*]
38 T: d- do you want this one?
39 S1: [n-no] =
40 T: =no,
41 (1.8)
42 S1: w- cou- could we- could we WORK like 205 and t- like
43 use the diagram in 205:, /to work like 199?=
44 T: /oh
45 T: =yeah. [*said quickly*] =
46 S1: =you know what I'm saying,
47 T: ok. (0.2) we use 205. we don't use its coordinate
48 system. we build our coordinate system.
49 [*T is looking at S1*]
50 S1: yeah. /[]
51 T: /ok,
52 (2.0)
53 T: the diagram is like
54 (11.0) [*T draws a diagram of a suspension bridge*]
55 S1: so we're using the diagram from: 205 but answering
56 the question from 199.
57 S?: [/]
58 T: /ok,
59 S1: is that what you're /[doing]
60 T: /we use 205 and we want to find
61 the (1.0)
62 S1: we're just gonna do 205 [*unintelligible talk among*
63 *students / . .*]
64 T: /horizontal location of the lowest point.
65 Ss: [*unintelligible talk among students*]
66 T: ok?
67 S: [*more unintelligible talk among students. S1 seems*

68 *to be explaining to others which problem the TA is*
69 *going to work]*
70 T: and also we do the maximum cable tension.
71 (0.8)
72 T: is that what you want? [*T looks at students*]
73 S1: yeah.=
74 T: =ok:. [*T turns to write on board*]
75 (1.2)
76 T: we know this is 200 [*T adds labels to diagram on*
77 *board*]
78 as what I: suggested there [*T points to a problem*
79 *previously written on the board*] now where do we put
80 the coordinate system. the origin.
81 S1: at the lowest point.
82 T: we put it here. ok, (1.8) x (0.2) y [*T draws a*
83 *coordinate system with its origin at the lowest*
84 *point in the cable*]

Discussion questions

(suggested answers are given in italics)

1. What is the main point of this classroom dialog? What are the TA and students trying to accomplish?

They are trying to decide which problem to work.

2. Why is it difficult for the TA and students to decide which problem to do in class?

The students want help with a certain kind of problem, but the TA and students are not able to find a problem that is enough like the one they are having trouble with.

3. What question is implied in the student's statement in lines 9-11? Rephrase the statement as a direct question. *The statement is: "[the other night] I tried to go through 199 like you did in class you even like gave us hints and I still couldn't figure it out." It implies that the student would like some kind of help with problem #199. So the statement is really a request. A rephrasing might be something like, "Could you work a problem similar to number 199?--because I haven't been able to figure that one out."*

(see lines 55-56 for another example of a statement that's really a question, in this case a request for information.)

4. In lines 35-37 there is an 8 second pause. What could the TA be thinking or observing during this time that causes her to ask the question in line 38?

She may be thinking that the problem is too easy. She may see students asking each other questions, flipping pages in the book, looking puzzled or dissatisfied, and so on. What she observes indicates to her that the students do not actually want to work through problem number 205 (probably because it is simpler than the one they are having trouble with).

5. Look at lines 55 and following. How is the TA's response in line 58 ("ok") problematic? How do the TA and students work together to solve the misunderstanding? What language could the TA have used in line 58 to make her meaning more clear?

The "ok" does not answer the student's implied question, "Are we using the diagram from 205 but answering the question from 199?" So the student repeats the question, in actual question form, in line 59. The problem seems to be resolved in line 70 when the TA says that they will also find the maximum cable tension. This seems to be the information that the student was looking for. In line 58, the TA could have answered with something like, "Yes, that's what we're doing" or with a more precise description of what she was planning to do with the problem.