



Does EFL teacher talk promote effective classroom interaction? : An application of self evaluation of teacher talk at the tertiary level

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ملخص

للتفاعل في القسم أهمية بالغة لاكتساب أو تعلم أي لغة ثانية أو أجنبية ، مما زاد في الاهتمام العلمي بدراسة ومناقشة خصائص محادثة الأستاذ باعتباره المتغير الأساسي الذي يؤثر في فهم وإنتاج اللغة. انطلاقا من هذا المبدأ يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحليل وتقييم خصائص محادثة الأستاذ المختص في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السياق الجزائري، وإدراك مدى تطابق خصائصه مع خصائص المحادثة الفعالة التي تعزز مشاركة الطلبة. ولهذا الغرض، تم ملاحظة محادثة أستاذين ذوي خبرة في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة العربي بن مهيدي بأم البواقي لمدة ثلاثة حصص متتالية. بعدها تم تحليل محتوى هذه المحادثة بالاعتماد على أوراق الملاحظة التي ضمت خصائص التفاعل المقترحة من طرف والش (2006) الخاصة بالتقييم الذاتي لمحاضرة الأستاذ. يستند هذا التحليل على الفرضية القائلة أن محادثة الأستاذ تم خصائص تفاعلية بإمكانها تسهيل أو عرقلة اكتساب اللغة من طرف الطرف المستهدف.

الكلمات الدالة: محادثة الأستاذ؛ قسم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ التقييم الذاتي؛ اكتساب لغة ثانية؛ إنتاج.

Abstract

Classroom interaction has long been considered pertinent to the acquisition/learning of any second or foreign language. Thus, tremendous scholarly concern has shifted from discussing the most effective methods/ approaches to teaching to the characteristics of teacher talk by assuming that it is the chief variable which more likely affects learners' comprehension and production of the target language. Starting from this principle, the aim of this paper is to analyze and evaluate the features of EFL teacher talk in the Algerian context, and to find out the extent to which they meet the

requirements of an effective talk that promotes students' involvement. To this end, two experienced EFL teachers at Larbi Ben M'hidi University, Oum El Bouaghi, were chosen to be the participants in the study. Their talk was observed during three successive sessions. The talk was then analyzed according to observation sheets comprising the interactional features proposed by Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) designed by Walsh (2006). The analysis is based on the premise that teacher talk embraces interactional features which may either foster or hinder the acquisition of the target language.

Keywords: teacher talk; EFL class; SETT; second language acquisition; output; Algeria.

Résumé

L'interaction dans une salle d'enseignement est généralement considérée comme un facteur déterminant dans l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère, ce qui a amené les chercheurs sur les méthodes d'enseignement à accorder plus d'importance à l'étude de la parole de l'enseignant. Partant de ce principe, la présente contribution se propose d'analyser et d'évaluer les caractéristiques de la parole de l'enseignant de l'anglais comme langue étrangère dans le contexte algérien, et de connaître l'adéquation de cette parole avec les formes renforçant la participation des étudiants. Le corpus ainsi constitué est analysé selon la grille d'observation élaborée par Walsh (2006) pour vérifier une hypothèse montrant que les caractéristiques de la parole de l'enseignant comportent autant de facilités de compréhension que de risques d'inaccessibilité au contenu diffusé.

Mots-clés: Parole de l'enseignant; anglais langue étrangère; apprentissage d'une langue; l'autoévaluation; production; contexte Algérien.

Introduction

The increased need for English – as a lingua franca - in the era of globalization calls up for new strategies to ensure effective instruction. In contexts where the classroom is the sole setting of exposure to the target language, the practice of teaching/learning becomes more challenging. Alternatively, Classroom interaction has been widely acknowledged by researchers to play a prominent role in language learning. Hence, the investigation of what is going on in classroom discourse and



what roles are played by teachers and learners come to the fore. Strobelberger (Strobelberger, 2012, p. 3) declared:

Analyzing classroom discourse in order to highlight its characteristic features, therefore, constitutes a worthwhile task since its findings may be used to improve teaching. In this way, teachers might become more aware of the way teachers and learners jointly create learning opportunities, and subsequently classroom discourse might be adjusted in order to enhance learning.

Tsui (2011) used the term “classroom discourse” to cover linguistic and non-linguistic elements which occur in the classroom. It encompasses any discourse taking place in the classroom between teachers and students or among students with or without the teacher (Pontecorvo, 1997). Since the present study is “teacher-focused research” (Nunan, 1990), the focus will be on the features that portray the talk of EFL teachers at the Department of English, Oum El Bouaghi University. To put it another way, it seeks to provide a detailed explanation and evaluation of teacher talk and the extent to which EFL teachers employ interactional features that facilitate learning.

1. Review of the Literature

1.1. Teacher Talk

Classroom communication or what is described as “problematic medium” (Cazden, 2001) is an essential topic which is recognized by any educator who is interested in the improvement of the teaching/ learning process. A rational analysis of such communication is probably based on the analysis of the talk produced by the teacher which, in turn, has a dual function: the primary means of controlling learners’ behavior and the major way of conveying information (Strobelberger, 2012). The term “teacher talk” has been defined by different scholars (Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 2008; Nunan, 1990) in diverse ways; however, a more wide-ranging definition goes to Ellis (2008). According to him, L2 teacher talk can be considered as a special “register” which is analogous to foreigner talk. He adds that studies of teacher



talk have sought to describe its phonological, lexical, grammatical and discoursal properties. These studies have been motivated by the felt need to document the nature of the 'input' that learners are exposed to in classroom environment (p.794).

Nunan (1990) provided a comprehensible definition that fits the aim of this research when he used the term to cover four different variables which may either facilitate or impede language acquisition. For him, teacher talk embraces the types of questions that teachers ask, the amount and type of teacher talk, the type of error correction and feedback that teachers provide, and the modifications that teachers introduce in their speech when talking to second language learners.

1.1.1. Questioning Behavior

Ellis (2008) declared that the prevalence of questioning, either in content classrooms or in language classrooms, is undoubtedly attributed to the control it gives to the teacher over the discourse. Eventually, a question is likely to occupy the first part of the three-phase IRE/F pattern of interaction where I stands for teacher initiation, R is the learner response and E/F is the evaluation or feedback of the teacher (Sinclair, 1975). The value of questioning behavior is even more accentuated by the bulk of literature which is swirling around the following areas:

- The frequency of the different types of questions;
- Wait time or what is referred to as the length of time the teacher is prepared to wait for an answer;
- The nature of the learners' output when answering the questions;
- The effect of the learners' level of proficiency on questioning;
- The possibility of training teachers to ask more "communicative questions";
- The variation evident in teachers' questioning strategies;

Considerable research on questioning behavior has been informed by the assumption that L2 learning will be enhanced



if the questions result in active learner participation and meaning negotiation. Walsh (2006: 8) distinguished two types of questions according to their function: display and referential questions. In the former, the teacher already knows the answer (e.g., what is the past tense of go?), whereas in the latter the answer is not known in advance (e.g., do you have any brothers and sisters?). In a study conducted by Long and Sato (1984), it has been found that their target ESL teachers tend to ask more display than referential questions as opposed to native speaker behavior outside the classroom where referential questions predominate. They reached the conclusion that teachers tend to emphasize form over meaning and accuracy over communication (Cited in Ellis, 2008).

1.1.2. Feedback

Feedback is considered as another significant component of teacher talk. It is something that validates or rebuts what is stated by the learner. Ellis (Ellis, 2006, p.28) defined it as “responses to learner utterances containing an error”. Krashen (1982) clearly highlighted the issue of error correction by arguing that it is both useless for acquisition and dangerous since it may lead to negative affective filter. Ellis (2008) adopted a subjective view stating that all classroom learners need to be corrected. Lyster’s (2015) view aligns with the latter. He declared: “Theoretical perspectives that run the gamut from skill acquisition theory to cognitive – interactionist and sociocultural orientations posit that corrective feedback (CF) is not only beneficial but may also be necessary for moving learners forward in their second language (L2) development” (p.2013)

Based on the taxonomy of CF types identified in teacher-student interaction in French immersion classrooms, Ranta and Lyster (2007) distinguished between reformulations and prompts. Reformulations encompass recasts and explicit correction because these moves provide learners with target reformulations of their non-target output. Conversely, prompts are signals that drive learners to self-repair without supplying the correct form, including CF moves such as: elicitation,



clarification requests, repetition of learner error, metalinguistic clues or explanations and paralinguistic signals (cited in Lyster, 2015).

1.2. Language use VS pedagogical purpose

In his description of the interactional architecture of L2 classroom interaction, Seed house (2004) recognized the core institutional goal as the role teachers play when teaching L2. This goal is persistent wherever the L2 lesson is taking place, whatever pedagogical work the teacher is working in, and whatever the teaching methods applied. He identified three “universal” properties of L2 classrooms which shape the interaction. In his own words: “the three properties follow in rational sequence from each other and constitute part of the unique fingerprint of L2 classroom interaction and part of its context-free machinery” (p.183)

- 1st- Language is both the vehicle and the object of instruction;
- 2nd- There is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction, and interactants constantly display their analysis of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction;
- 3rd- The linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learners produce in the L2 are potentially subject to evaluation by the teacher.

Along the same line, Walsh (Walsh, 2002, p.5) stated clearly that learning a second language becomes more meaningful when there is a match between language use and pedagogic purpose. In his own words, “Where language use and pedagogic purpose coincide, learning opportunities are facilitated; conversely, where there is a significant deviation between language use and teaching goal at a given moment in a lesson, opportunities for learning and acquisition are, I would suggest, missed”.

For the evaluation of teacher talk, Walsh (Walsh, 2006, 2011) designed an instrument which he called Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) in collaboration with EFL teachers in view



of fostering teacher development through classroom interaction. It was initially designed to assist teachers in describing classroom interaction of their lessons, to develop an understanding of interactional processes, and eventually to help them promote their teaching practice to become “better” teachers (Walsh, 2011, p. 111)

The framework comprises four teaching modes: Managerial, Materials, Skills and systems, and Classroom Context modes. Based on the notion of “fingerprint” adopted from Heritage & Greatbatch (1991), Walsh concluded that each mode has its fingerprint, including pedagogic and linguistic features. He noted: “the fingerprint of classroom context mode is markedly different to that of managerial mode; both are different again from skills and systems mode” (2011, p.112). The four modes are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. L2 Classroom Modes (Walsh, 2006)

Mode	Pedagogic goals	Interactional features
Managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To transmit information -To organize the physical learning environment -To refer learners to materials -To introduce or conclude an activity -To change from one mode of learning to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A single, extended teacher turn which uses explanations and/or instructions -The use of transitional markers -The use of confirmation checks -An absence of learner contribution
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To provide language practice around a piece of material -To elicit responses in relation to the material -To check and display answers -To clarify when necessary -To evaluate contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predominance of IRF pattern -Extensive use of display questions -Form -focused feedback -Corrective repair -The use of scaffolding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To enable learners to produce correct forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The use of direct



Skills and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To enable learners to manipulate the target language -To provide corrective feedback -To provide learners with practice in sub-skills -To display correct answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> repair -The use of scaffolding -Extended teacher turns -Display questions -Teacher echo -Clarification requests -Form-focused feedback
Classroom context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To enable learners to express themselves clearly -To establish a context -To promote oral fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Extended teacher turn -Short teacher turns -Minimal repair -Content feedback -Referential questions -Scaffolding -Clarification requests
Mode	Pedagogic goals	Interactional features
Managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To transmit information -To organize the physical learning environment -To refer learners to materials -To introduce or conclude an activity -To change from one mode of learning to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A single, extended teacher turn which uses explanations and/or instructions -The use of transitional markers -The use of confirmation checks -An absence of learner contribution
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To provide language practice around a piece of material -To elicit responses in relation to the material -To check and display answers -To clarify when necessary -To evaluate contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predominance of IRF pattern -Extensive use of display questions -Form -focused feedback -Corrective repair -The use of scaffolding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To enable learners to produce correct forms -To enable learners to manipulate the target 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The use of direct repair -The use of scaffolding



Skills and systems	language -To provide corrective feedback -To provide learners with practice in sub-skills -To display correct answers	-Extended teacher turns -Display questions -Teacher echo -Clarification requests -Form-focused feedback
Classroom context	-To enable learners to express themselves clearly -To establish a context -To promote oral fluency	-Extended teacher turn -Short teacher turns -Minimal repair -Content feedback -Referential questions -Scaffolding -Clarification requests

In another study conducted by Walsh (2002), he compiled interactional features into two categories. The first category embraces features of teacher talk that contribute to the construction of SLA, and it includes direct error correction, content feedback, checking for confirmation, extended wait-time, and scaffolding. The second category embraces features that obstruct SLA, and it includes: Turn completion, teacher echo, and teacher interruptions.

2. The Study

2.1. Participants and Methodology

Two instructors teaching two different courses (Linguistics and Civilization) at the department of English at the University of Oum El Bouaghi participated in the study. The classes are heterogeneous in terms of gender and they have a total number of 75 first year students aged between 17-20 years old. The classes also consist of students with mixed abilities as determined throughout an interview with the teacher prior to conducting the observation.

The participants were observed once a week over a period of three weeks, mainly between April 09th and May 01st. A quantitative approach is applied to evaluate teachers' talk in the classes under scrutiny. To this end, classroom observations sheets are designed according to Walsh's Self Evaluation of



Teacher Talk model, henceforth SETT. In the framework of this model, the four classroom modes are highlighted along with the frequency of occurrence of the interactional features in each mode. The analysis is based on the premise that SLA is facilitated when language use is in tune with pedagogical aims. Conversely, SLA is likely to be obstructed/ impeded when there is no correspondence between pedagogical aims and language use.

2.2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Features that Construct or Obstruct Teacher's Talk

Based on the study conducted by Walsh (2002), an overall analysis of the data gathered from the two classes reveals the following:

Class 1

In this class, the course of civilization is taught by a very well-experienced male teacher who is in his sixties. It revolves around the making of English colonies in the United States. The material usually includes a book chapter and a map of America along with the board and the chalk to highlight crucial points from time to time. The teacher employed the three modes: Managerial, Materials, and Skills and systems modes (Appendix-Table 1). Regarding the flow of the interaction, teacher 1 never employed features pertaining to scaffolding or direct error correction. He barely made use of confirmation checks and extended wait-time. Nevertheless, there is a reasonable occurrence of content feedback. Meanwhile, the data display instances of teacher interruption features, one feature of teacher echo and the non- occurrence of teacher interruption. This reveals that while there are no features that more likely obstruct SLA, the teacher is not aware enough of the features that contribute to the facilitation of SLA.

Class 2

In this class, the course of Linguistics is taught by a mid- career male teacher who is in his thirties. The observed lessons are swirling around the different criteria used to classify languages



with an emphasis on the morphological classification, hence isolating, agglutinative, fusional, and polysynthetic languages. The material usually includes handouts along with the board and the chalk to highlight ambiguous points from time to time. The teacher employed the four modes: Managerial, Materials, Skills and systems modes, and classroom context mode (Appendix-Table 2).

The analysis of data according to interactional features divulges the occurrence of features that impede SLA, mainly teacher echo and teacher interruptions. Nevertheless, the features that contribute to the construction of SLA outnumber the ones that hinder it. For instance, the teacher did not devote enough time for direct error correction, confirmation checks or scaffolding, yet the data display an ample number of features regarding content feedback and extended wait-time.

2.2. Pedagogic purpose vis-à-vis language Use

An overall analysis of data displayed in both tables reveals that not all the interactional features are employed to serve the pedagogical purposes associated with each mode. In the managerial mode of the two participants, the only feature which comes into sight consistently is 'extended teacher turn'. It is worth mentioning that the number of extended turns used by teacher 1 exceeds those of teacher 2. Evidently, as stated by Walsh (2002), in materials mode the teacher is the one who is supposed to dominate classroom interaction to achieve the following goals: to transmit information, to organize the physical learning environment, to refer learners to materials, to introduce and conclude an activity, and to change from one mode of learning to another. This fact is contradicted with the occurrence of learner contribution, a feature which is not expected to take place in this mode. Surprisingly, the data reveals the occurrence of learner contribution where an absence of learner turn-taking is required.

Regarding materials mode, it is employed to accomplish the following goals: to provide language practice around a piece of material, to elicit responses in relation to the material, to check



and display answers, to clarify when necessary, and to evaluate contributions (Walsh, 2002). Interestingly enough, both participants did not make use of the required features that coincide with the aforementioned goals except for an extensive use of display questions. Hence, the observed teachers neglected the use of scaffolding, corrective repair, and form-focused feedback.

Skills and systems mode is used mainly to enable learners to manipulate target language produce correct forms or provide them with practice in sub-skills (Walsh, 2002). With reference to this mode, the teachers unsatisfactorily employed the required interactional features. Teacher 1, for instance, barely incorporated display questions or form focused feedback in his discourse as the majority of the features represent extended teacher turns. Surprisingly, there are some features which are entirely neglected, mainly the use of direct repair, the use of scaffolding and teacher echo. Teacher 2 did not employ any of the features except for one instance of teacher extended turn used by the former and three instances of form-focused feedback used by the latter.

The last mode which is called 'context mode' is mainly used to establish a context, to enable the learners to express themselves clearly, and to establish oral fluency. Despite the importance of this mode in helping students develop proficiency in the target language, the data obtained from both classes do not indicate any interactional feature associated with this mode.

Conclusion

To sum up, the results of the study indicate that there is no satisfactory correspondence between pedagogic goals and language use. This discrepancy could be explained by teachers' lack of awareness of the features that regulate teacher talk for the sake of creating a classroom atmosphere where all students have an equal right of contribution.



An in-depth analysis of the data reveals that the use of managerial and materials modes prevail over skills and systems mode. Moreover, there is no focus on classroom context mode despite its importance in developing students' oral fluency and allowing them to express themselves clearly. Instead, teachers make more use of skills and systems mode as their focus in order to get learners to manipulate the target language and produce correct forms. On that account, teachers' focus on accuracy rather than devoting ample efforts to promote fluency is deemed to be a barrier against creating a genuine interaction in the language classroom.

Based on the discussion of the structure of teacher talk following Walsh's (2006) framework which was drawn as guidance for observation for the present study, it could be concluded that teacher talking time appears to overreach student talking time. It is an outcome that neither corroborates with the instrument proposed as a model nor with an ideal talk that every language teacher should be seeking to meet the challenges of instruction in a digitalized era.

Eventually, the results of the research prompt forthcoming questions regarding the features noticed in the talk of the observed teachers. Does teacher domination of classroom talk imply teachers' insecurity inside the EFL class? Is it due to overcrowded classes? is it due to the lack of teacher training, or to the teachers' influence by traditional methods and their reluctance to break the cycle of teaching the way they are taught rather than teaching the way they are trained?

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Appendix

Table 1. Interactional Features of Teacher 1

Prevailing modes	Interactional features	Tally
Managerial mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	09
	-Extended wait-time	01
	-Referential questions	02
	-Seeking clarification	00
	-confirmation checks	01
	-Extended learner turn	05
	-Teacher echo	00
	-Teacher interruption	00
	-Extended teacher turn	21
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	10
	-Form focused feedback	00
Materials Mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	07
	-Extended wait-time	02
	-Referential questions	00
	-Seeking clarification	01
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	02
	-Teacher echo	03
	-Teacher interruptions	04
	-Extended-teacher turn	45
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	19
	-Form focused feedback	00
Skills and Systems Mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	01
	-Extended wait-time	00
	-Referential questions	00
	-Seeking clarification	00
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	00



	-Teacher echo	00
	-Teacher interruptions	00
	-Extended teacher turn	04
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	02
	-Form focused feedback	01

Table 2. Interactional Features of Teacher 2

Prevailing modes	Interactional features	Tally
Managerial mode	-Scaffolding	01
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	09
	-Extended wait-time	04
	-Referential questions	00
	-Seeking clarification	00
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	12
	-Teacher echo	01
	-Teacher interruptions	01
	-Extended teacher turn	36
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	15
-Form focused feedback	00	
Materials Mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	20
	-Extended wait-time	12
	-Referential questions	02
	-Seeking clarification	01
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	13
	-Teacher echo	04
	-Teacher interruptions	06
	-Extended-teacher turn	92
	-Turn-completion	00
	-Display questions	27
Form -focused feedback	00	
Skills and Systems Mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00



	-Content feedback	00
	-Extended wait-time	00
	-Referential questions	00
	-Seeking clarification	00
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	00
	-Teacher echo	00
	-Teacher interruptions	00
	-Extended teacher turn	01
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	00
	-Form focused feedback	00
Classroom context mode	-Scaffolding	00
	-Direct repair	00
	-Content feedback	00
	-Extended wait-time	00
	-Referential questions	00
	-Seeking clarification	00
	-Confirmation checks	00
	-Extended learner turn	00
	-Teacher echo	00
	-Teacher interruptions	00
	-Extended teacher turn	00
	-Turn completion	00
	-Display questions	01
	-Form-focused feedback	06



**Table 3. Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (Walsh, 2006, 2011)
(Framework of The Study)**

a. Scaffolding	-Reformulation (Rephrasing a learner's contribution) -Extension (Extending a learners' contribution) - Modeling (Correcting a learner's contribution)
b. Direct repair	-Correcting an error quickly and directly
c. Content feedback	-Giving feedback to the message rather than the words used
d. Extended wait-time	- Allowing sufficient time (several seconds) for students to respond or formulate a response
e. e-Referential questions	-Genuine questions to which the teacher does not know the answer
f. f-Seeking clarification	-Teacher asks a student to clarify something the student has said - Student asks teacher to clarify something the teacher has said
g. g- Confirmation checks	-Making sure that the teacher has correctly understood the learner's contribution
h. h-Extended learner turn	-Learner turn of more than one clause
i. Teacher echo	-Teacher repeats a previous utterance -Teacher repeats a learner's contribution
j. Teacher interruptions	-Interrupting a learner's contribution
k. Extended teacher turn	-Teacher turn of more than one clause
l. Turn completion	-Completing a learner's contribution for the learner
m. Display questions	-Asking questions to which the teacher knows the answer
n. n-Form focused feedback	-Giving feedback on the words used, not the message
o. Scaffolding	-Reformulation (Rephrasing a learner's contribution)



	-Extension (Extending a learners' contribution) - Modeling (Correcting a learner's contribution)
p. Direct repair	-Correcting an error quickly and directly
q. Content feedback	-Giving feedback to the message rather than the words used
r. Extended wait-time	- Allowing sufficient time (several seconds) for students to respond or formulate a response
s. e-Referential questions	-Genuine questions to which the teacher does not know the answer

