

Teacher Talk and Learner Involvement in EFL Classroom: The Case of Iranian Setting

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Abstract—The present study was an attempt to investigate the ways through which teacher talk can create opportunities for learning in an EFL classroom. In addition, it identified how the teacher talk can lead to more and more learner involvement in an EFL context. The study also determined the types of the teacher talk which can decrease learning a foreign language. To achieve such aims, three experienced teachers who were teaching English as a foreign for more than 5 years were selected based on the purposeful sampling procedure to serve as the participants of the study. Their talk was audio recorded for three subsequent sessions and then analyzed based on the interactional features proposed by Self evaluation of teacher talk (SETT) framework. The findings supported the role of the teacher talk as being a determinant one in the performance of the foreign language learners. Also, the results of this research play a significant role in ascertaining the ways in which Iranian foreign language teachers improve their talk to optimize learner contribution. Therefore, a teacher should be able to shape learners contribution and make strategic decision in the moment by moment of lesson according to SETT framework which is regarded as a crucial factor for developing foreign language learning in L2 classroom context.

Index Terms—conversation analysis, interactional features, EFL classroom

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication in the EFL classroom is a complicated phenomenon which is central to classroom activities. Therefore interaction in EFL classroom is considered to be the key to learning a foreign language and according to Van Lier (1996, cited in Walsh, 2006) if a foreign language teacher wants to become effective teacher, interaction should be considered as the most important thing in the SLA curriculum.

An effective teacher should try to improve second language classroom and promote learning for doing it. There are many ways in which teachers can influence learning through their choice of language and their interactional decision making (Walsh, 2002).

Every EFL teacher not only understands classroom communication but also to improve second language classroom and promote learning for doing it. Less than any decade, ESL books have been changed in Iran; however no outstanding developments have occurred in second language learning. This is indicative of the fact that merely changing the conversational books or increasing academic knowledge of the teachers is not enough for the improvement of teaching and learning.

Glew (1998, p. 2, as cited in Walsh, 2006) argues that SLA occurs through the interaction that take place between the learner's mental abilities and the linguistic environment. According to Long (1983, 1996, as cited in Walsh, 2011) Learning can be promoted through communication, when learners engage in the negotiation of meaning. The quality of interaction is determined by teachers in their face to face communication with learners. An awareness of the interactional processes can help teachers and learners have a comprehensive understanding of how language is acquires in a formal context (Walsh, 2006).

In Iranian context, some teachers deliberately or not, create opportunities for learner involvement since their use of language and pedagogic purposes coincide with each other. Sometimes, in an EFL classroom, however the teacher does not know how to facilitate student involvement by constructing a context in which student involved. Some teachers appear to impede interaction and obstruct student involvement. Some of them cannot control the use of language, cannot match pedagogic and linguistic goals. Therefore they cannot maximize learner involvement which is conducive to foreign language acquisition.

Although some institution use up-to-date conversational books and employ experienced teacher with good English language, they cannot make dramatic changes in foreign language learning because their methodologies, their choice of language use remain somehow constant.

Walsh (2002), considered how a teacher through their choice of language, construct or obstruct learner participation in face to face classroom interaction. From his research emerged a number of ways in which teachers can improve their teacher talk to facilitate and optimize learner contribution.

In the following, this study investigated the extend to which EFL Iranian teachers hinder and facilitate learning for students through their choice of language, how the teacher can enhance language use and in what way the teacher deny opportunities for foreign language learning. Some teachers in conversational classes appear to impede interaction and obstruct student involvement. This study considered the ways through which the teacher can construct or obstruct student involvement in face to face classroom communication in conversation class and identified the ways EFL Iranian teachers can improve themselves and optimize student involvement. In addition, second language teacher should find interactional awareness to control use of language in class to improve teaching and learning because teacher's ability to control use of language in class is as important as their ability to select appropriate methodologies.

II. BACKGROUND

Among different tenets of language teaching investigation, conversation analysis is the one which widely contributes to the course of research through the examinations of teacher talk in second language classroom. According to Firth and Wagner (1997, 2007, as cited in Gruyter) learning should be seen as a social process and language should be considered as a complex, dynamic system which is managed by teacher and learner. Also, Learning can be happened in the moment by moment co-construction of meaning and by using conversational analysis. In another word learning occurs through interaction with others.

According to Edwards and Westgate (1994, as cited in Gruyter)

The point is that classroom talk should be similar a conversation, since most of the time for practical purposes it cannot, but that institutionalized talk.... shows a heightened use of procedures which have their 'base' in ordinary conversation and are more clearly understand through comparison with it (p.116).

Walsh (2002) in one of his research examines the ways to show to the teachers, understanding classroom communication, shaping learner contribution and making strategic decision in the moment by moment of a lesson are very crucial factors for developing SLA in L2 classroom context. The study reported that the teachers make extensive use of metalanguage designed to enable them to make good interactive decisions online by using sample of their own data. The process of interpreting data and 'meaning-making' in the reflective feedback interview lead to teachers make conscious changes in own classes.

In another research, Walsh (2003) proposes a process model of reflective practice for second language teachers, designed to facilitated closer understanding of language use and interactive decision making. The L2 classroom is shown as a dynamic and complex series of inter-related contexts, in which interaction is central to teaching and learning. An understanding of the interactional organization of the L2 classroom is achieved through the use of SETT procedures. Naturalistic research methods were used to emerge new views for understanding and interactional competence of a small group of university EFL teachers. These methods were originated form institutional discourse conversational analysis methodology, action research, and sociocultural research perspective. In this study, teachers were found opportunities to see their classrooms. Totally, the process of consciousness-raising in this study, was designed to redirect teacher's attention away from materials or methodology-based decisions towards decisions on interactional choice.

In the following, Walsh (2006) expresses that the important point in every second language classroom is that the appropriate language use in every second language classroom occurs when teachers are sufficiently aware of their goal at moment by moment in a lesson to match their teaching aim and pedagogic purpose to their language use.

In addition, discussing the Talk of the TESOL Classroom (2006), Walsh determined different ways to enable an EFL second language teacher to shape learners contributions and make strategic decision in the moment by moment of a lesson. The study determined that there is a mutual relationship between the interaction and language learning. Moreover he argued that the developing interactional awareness for teachers lead to using appropriate interactional features and then teacher awareness is exemplified in their use of metalanguage, critical self evaluation and more conscious interactive decision making. In his research, SETT framework helps facilitate second language learning. His research is an attempt to investigate the ways through which a foreign language teacher can increase learning opportunities and improve EFL classroom. This research is limited to Iranian EFL classroom.

This study considered, EFL Iranian teachers in Top Notch conversational books, at fundamental level, to describe, how to Iranian teachers can create opportunism for foreign language learning or deny opportunities for learning. Recognition these opportunities help EFL learners consiously increase learning a foreign language.

III. METHOD

A. Participants

For the purposes of the study, three EFL teachers with their students selected to participate in this study. In each class there were approximately 12 learners, their age ranged from 18 to 26. They were in the same level, intermediate, and had similar needs as a learner. One of the main reasons for choosing these three classes at the fundamental level was

that the basic level was the most important step in conversational class. The focus of these classes was increasing oral fluency.

B. Materials

The data for this study were gathered through studying students in Top Notch conversation classes, at the fundamental level and audio recorded for later analysis. Each of the three experienced teacher who was selected to participate in this study was recorded for three subsequence sessions (four hours and 30 minutes for each class). The lesson for each one was different from another. After gathering the data and mode operating according to Walsh's model, they were analyzed based on the principles of conversation analysis (CA).

C. Procedures

Any language classroom, according to the protocol of each second language class, must involve four modes and fourteen interactional features. Based on the curriculum and design of Top Notch books, SETT framework is followed and exercised during these conversational classes unconsciously. Each of these three classes was recorded for three subsequence sessions. After gathering the data and mode operating according to Walsh's model, they were analyzed based on the principles of CA. This method was used in Walsh's studies (2006, 2011) that it was received in an email message from Steve Walsh in September. In this study, all of the phrases and sentences transcribed, analyzed and all interactional features were determined.

D. Data Analysis

The Analysis of the teacher talk should be done in the light of the overall aims and modes operating. In this analysis lesson modes should also be identified. Teacher talk is analyzed according to the interactional features of Walsh. Moreover, Mann-Whitney U test is conducted in conducting the present analysis. In the following, features in the classes were grouped under two positive and negative impacts. Three features of teacher echo, teacher interruption and turn completion were analyzed under the negative effect based on the interfering role in sustaining oral communication. Thus, scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, referential question, seeking clarification, extended teacher turn, display question and extended learner turn were categorized under the positive effect due to their encouraging nature in improving the learners' attempts in Top Notch conversational book, at fundamental level.

Our analysis focuses on the ways in which three non-native English teachers create space and sometimes deny opportunities for learning through their choice of language. First, specific features in second language classroom seem to enhance space were presented through five short extracts.

A). Scaffolding (in turn 27, 29, 31)

26. L2: ... vegetables is...good for us and ...and sandwich is bad for us=

27. T: =vegetables=

28. L2: =vegetables

29. T: ... plural form of the verb after vegetables (3)

30. L2: vegetables are=

31. T: = vegetables are good, not vegetables is good. Every day you should eat vegetables like lettuce, carrots, cucumber...and other thing because all of them are good for your body

Communication breakdown is very common feature of an EFL classroom and it occurs because learners do not find appropriate words or phrases to express their thought. Scaffolding describes the ways in which teachers provide learners with linguistic support to help self-expression (Bruner, 1983, 1990, as cited in Walsh, 2006). In this skill a teacher is similar to many parents when helping their young children (Walsh, 2006); therefore teacher can involve learners in a conversation to find a correct word at a given moment.

B). Extended Wait Time (in turn 43, 47)

43. T: = but I am not sure (laugher) (3) so...Mohammad what can you do? (3)

44. L (Mohammad):= I can play soccer I can...I can cook

45. T: =you can cook

46. L (Mohamad):=I ...can swim

47. T: =what can't you do? (5)

In the above extract extended wait time is created during the dialogue and in the following extract learners contribute with no teacher intervention.

194. T: ok...who is ready? Hasan and Ali...come here

195. L (Ali): can you draw=

196. L (Hasan): =no can you=

197. L (Ali): =yes I draw very well=

198. L (Hasan): =when did you learn=

199. L (Ali): =when I was about... eight...

200. L (Hasan): was it hard

201. L(Ali): not at all

Extended wait-time is the time allowed by teacher to answer a question (Nunan, 1991, as cited in Walsh, 2006, 2011), thus it increases the number of learners responses which lead to longer answers and more learner contribution.

C). Direct Error Correction (in turn 52, 54)

49. T: = because they move to Japan...and now tell do you like to visit japan

50. LL: =yes. 50

51. L6: I like to... ((4)) Japan, China, Italy=

52. T: =I like to go to Japan, China, Italy...what about other (3)

53. L7: kore=

54. T: =Korea

Direct error correction is a common skill in second language classroom. Furthermore, direct error correction is preferred by learners (Seedhouse, 1977).

D. Seeking Clarification (in turn 174)

173. L12: what do... I was about eight (5) mean=

174. T:= about eight...it means that he can't remember the exact time...maybe he was seven and 10 months and ...maybe he was eight and 2 month therefor he says I am about eight...and what does not at all mean?...what does it mean.....

175. L12: no=

Seeking clarification is a mutual relationship that occurs between teacher and learners, thus sometimes the teacher asks a learner to clarify something that a learner has said and sometimes learners ask the teacher to clarify something that teacher has said (Walsh, 2006, 2011).

E). Content Feedback (in turn 193)

191. T: yes we have falling intonation when your question start with WH question or information questions...so memorize a conversation=

192. L (4): =sir I memorizes it (laughter)

193. T: thank you let's other memorize the conversation you are the first one I will ask you, he is so...so eager to learn English

Content feedback imply to teachers personal reaction to comments made by learners (Walsh, 2006, 2011).

In contrast, sometimes teacher talk lead to interactional space reduced and opportunities for learning minimized. The extracts determine how foreign language learning decrease.

F). Turn Completion (in turn 235, 237)

233. L5:= she can't wear those pants. They're too long

234. L6:=she can't buy those shoes, they are too... too...

235. T: big

236. L7:=he doesn't want that shirt.it too...too...

237. T: it's too small=

238. L8:=I don't want this sofa ...it's too expensive

Turn completion happens in EFL classroom when teachers fill in the gaps and advance the discussion (Walsh, 2006, 2011). When turn completion happens in EFL classroom, there is no negotiation of meaning, no need for clarification and confirmation check.

G). Teacher Echo (in turn 267, 269)

266=. L (Mohamad):I can cook well but I can't ski

267. T: = you can't ski=

268. L (Mohamad):=I can drive=

269. T: =you can [drive]

F). Teacher Interruption (in turn 264)

262. L (Maryam): please pass the ...yogurt

263. L (Fateme): sure (mispronounced)

264. T: sure

265.L (Fateme): [sure]...here you go,[here you go]

Teacher echo is a common phenomenon in any second language classroom and it has a several functions (Walsh, 2006, 2011). The function of teacher echo in Top Notch conversation class, at Fundamental level is considered as a negative features because teachers do not know when and why to use echo. They allowed teacher echo to become a habit in their classes.

IV. RESULTS

Classroom discourse is the most important point that takes place in the foreign language classroom. Understanding an interaction in an EFL classroom helps EFL teachers to improve Teaching and learning. For doing so, researchers need to understand classrooms and analyze the interaction in the context.

Following the above detailed accounts of the nature of the teachers' employed features in reaction to the learners' communicative efforts, the observed features in the classes were grouped under two positive and negative impacts.

Accordingly, nine features of scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait time, referential question, seeking clarification, extended teacher turn, display questions and extended learner turn were categorized under the positive effect due to their encouraging nature in improving the learners' attempts. On the other hand, three features of teacher echo, teacher interruption and turn completion were analyzed under the negative effect based on their interfering role in sustaining oral communication in Top Notch conversation classes, at fundamental level in Iranian context.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNTS FOR THE EMPLOYED FEATURES IN THE CLASSES

Effect		Frequency	Percent
Positive	Scaffolding	74	9.8
	Direct Repair	39	5.2
	Content Feedback	21	2.8
	Extended Wait Time	142	18.8
	Referential Question	28	3.7
	Seeking Clarification	47	6.2
	Extended Teacher Turn	96	12.7
	Display Questions	69	9.1
	Extended Learner Turn	239	31.7
	Total	755	100.0
Negative	Teacher Echo	124	56.4
	Teacher Interruption	82	37.3
	Turn Completion	14	6.4
	Total	220	100.0

Based on the recorded data, out of 755 cases of positive features extended learner turn was the most frequently employed feature (31.7%) followed by extended wait time (18.8%) and extended teacher turn (12.7%). Meanwhile, content feedback (2.8%) and referential question (3.7%) were among the least frequent employed features in the classes.

On the other hand, out of 220 cases under the negative effect category, more than half belonged to the teacher echo (56.4%) and turn completion had the lowest frequency in this part (6.4%).

The following graph provides a clear representation of the observed features in the classes suggesting a number of suggestive hints.

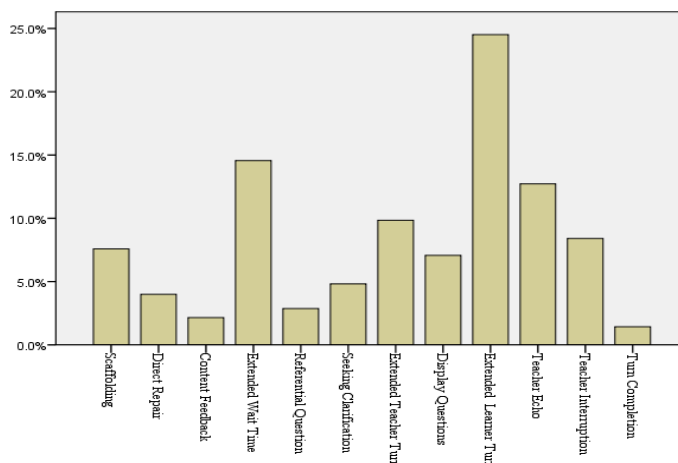


Figure 1. Employment of all the Features in the Classes

Besides approving the earlier mentioned comparative accounts of the employed features, this graph further highlights the fact that despite the high frequency of teacher echo employment, this negative feature lags far behind certain positive features like extended learner turn and extended wait time. In addition, the least frequent negative feature as turn completion is clearly lower than the least frequent features in the positive section.

Following the above descriptive accounts, in an attempt to assess the degree of difference in the use of positive and negative features, Mann-Whitney U test, the non-parametric parallel of T-test, was conducted. Accordingly, the differences in the numbers were statistically significant between the two positive and negative impact groups ($p < 0.05$). Put differently, the positive features had been highly favored by the teachers in their class management efforts in comparison with the negative features located on the other least frequent extreme.

V. DISCUSSION

After analysis of the data, features was divided into positive and negative features according to their constructiveness and destructiveness. Findings of this study are indicative of the fact that these Iranians context tend to show sign of constructiveness but the aim of this study was the Iranian teachers increase their interactional awareness.

Responding to the first research question concerning the extent of teacher create opportunities for learning in EFL classes is shaping a contribution by seeking clarification, scaffolding, modeling, extended wait-time, content feedback or repairing learner output. An EFL teacher is better to be informed that interactional space is maximized through increasing wait-time, reducing teacher echo and promoted extended learner turn. The focus of every conversation class in Iran is oral fluency and a teacher should be able to create opportunities to enhance learners' output. Using above strategies can greatly minimize the breakdown in communication and maximize learners understanding. In another word, for increasing learning, it should be deliberated the process of learning contribution by scaffolding, seeking clarification, extended wait-time or extended learner turn.

The second research question asked about the teacher talk that hinders second language learning. Teacher interruption, teacher echo and turn completion were destructive features. An EFL Teacher by extended wait-time and reducing teacher echo can decrease teacher interruption. When turn completion happened, there was no negotiation of meaning and therefore learning decreased. Decreasing these features in class, result in increasing language learning. Therefore using some appropriate strategies in second language learning can decrease the destructive features and increase learning.

The finding of this study corresponds to Walsh's studies in this area. Every foreign language classroom in Iranian context is held in order for learners to learn how to use a language as a vehicle for communication and the main focus of every EFL class is to consider the ways to optimize foreign language learning process. Walsh (2006) stated that any second language lesson can be considered as dynamic and complex series of interrelated context rather than a classroom as single social contexts. So interaction is the crucial part of teaching and learning. In order to enhance learning, learner should have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teacher talk, interaction and learning opportunities (Walsh, 2002). In addition, Walsh's studies (2006, 2011) determined that the best way for optimizing second language learning is shaping a contribution. Further interactional awareness help EFL teachers increase quality and quantity of the class.

VI. CONCLUSION

In each foreign language class, there are so many features, some of which are constructive and some of these are destructive. In order to optimize learning opportunities, a teacher should be trained to increase constructive features and try to decrease destructive ones. So in this research; it has been portrayed how an EFL teacher can become more effective. Design and curriculum of Top Notch conversational books which are very popular today in Iran, in some way, includes the framework of SETT. However, it is better for an EFL teacher to knowingly apply SETT framework by effective practice until it becomes part of the teacher's plan and classroom. This study showed that expanding SETT framework in Iranian context enhances second language learning.

In order to have a better second language classroom, teachers should be aware of all the interactional features which lead to the improvement of second language classroom or in another word a second language teacher should become the researcher of his own practice. Further research can investigate each EFL teacher for three consequent sessions (each session for 15 minutes) to understand if the teacher's awareness of interactional features can help them to improve their teaching and increase learning or not. Furthermore, a class can be determined as a control group, and another class can be considered as an experimental group and teacher in this class should have comprehensive information about interactional features. Finally, the result of the two classes can be compared.

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