Look Who's Talking?

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Emphasizing the classroom as one of the most important places where language learning occurs, this study looks at classroom interaction occurring in a class of adult ESL learners in a university-based intensive English program (IEP). This study is based on a sociocultural perspective of language and learning, which views language learning as a process of socialization into competent participation in socioculturally significant language practices. Using the data collected during seven weeks, this research investigates the functional characteristics of interactions that the participants construct in their classroom interactions with an emphasis on the teacher’s contributions that elicit students’ contributions. The major turn-taking interaction pattern was Initiation-Response-Follow up (IRF) and the students responded differently according to the types of the teacher’s utterances. I conclude this paper with deductions based on the findings of this research.

I. INTRODUCTION

From a sociocultural perspective, communication between teachers and students in L2 (Second Language) classrooms mediates between teaching, learning, and L2 acquisition. Together, teachers and students develop particular understandings of what constitutes language and language learning (Hall, 1995). Communication in the classroom is the most critical condition for L2 acquisition, since knowledge is something generated, constructed, indeed co-constructed in collaboration with others (Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 1995, 2001). Therefore, investigating what kinds of factors play roles in the L2 learning & teaching process for learners is very important. Based on a great number of studies about classroom interaction in L1 learning (Cazden, 2000; Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993) and on some recent research on L2 learning through classroom interaction, we can say that classroom interaction is critically related to L2 language learning (Consolo, 2000; Donato, 1994; Ohta
Even though not much research has been conducted on L2 learning from a sociocultural perspective, one outstanding finding of existing studies is that the teacher is the main character who controls the classroom and is responsible for facilitating students’ participation in classroom activities. It is a long acknowledged fact that the more students participate in classroom activities, the more they learn. Also, in previous studies, while there has been evidence that students learn L2 through classroom interaction, the specific kinds of interaction that lead to language learning have not been clear. In an effort to explore this underdeveloped field, my research looks into classroom interaction occurring in a university setting in a class of adult L2 learners, focusing on the functions of the teacher’s role.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Sociocultural Perspective

The major premises of the sociocultural perspective are based on the idea that human learning is mediated. Vygotsky (1978, 1981, 1986), who came up with this theoretical insight, articulated that human interaction, both with the environment and with others, occurs through the mediation of technical and psychological tools or signs, among these language being the most powerful of semiotic systems available in our social world (Anton, 1999; Hall, 2002; Lantolf, 2000). Influenced by our social, cultural, and historical setting, we learn the knowledge and skills that allow us to continue to participate in these activities through our relationships with more experienced or capable people (Hall 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Through repeated participation with various forms of assistance, such as scaffolding, modeling, and coaching, we internalize what we learn from social interaction and transform this knowledge into our own version of knowledge and abilities (Hall, 1997, 2002; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991).

According to Vygotsky (1978), this process occurs within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is defined as “the difference between the child’s developmental level as determined by the independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In other words, a knowledgeable participant provides support with which the novice can participate in social interaction, thereby extending the novice’s current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence.

From this perspective, “learning is not considered as the internal assimilation of structural
components of language systems. Rather it is a process of changing patterns of participation in specific social practices within communities of practices" (Cited in Gee & Green, 1998, p. 147; Hall & Walsh, 2002, p. 187). In this respect, the classroom is considered a very important social setting. In this setting language is acquired by learners during activities that are created through the face-to-face verbal interaction between teachers and students and among students.

2. Talk in the Classroom: IRE and IRF

Much language learning occurs in the classroom especially through the verbal interaction. The teacher’s role is crucial since teachers integrate every element under their rule to create or facilitate an appropriate learning environment in the classroom. Teachers can foster classroom conditions that encourage or restrict successful student participation (Hall, 1998). The teacher is the one who should be aware of differences among learners in order to diagnose needs, apply the proper level of learning support at any given time, and withdraw it at the right time. We can find the significance of the teacher’s role reflected on his/her utterances with the students. Of particular importance are the discourse patterns the teacher uses with his/her students in the classroom, such as the IRE and IRF.

IRE and IRF (Initiation-Response-Evaluation or Follow-up) are patterns usually found in the interaction between teacher and students (Cazden, 1988; Lemke, 1985; Mehan, 1979). Since Lemke (1985) first termed these triadic dialogues as IRE, this pattern has been considered the default form of interaction in the classroom since a number of studies revealed the actual use of the IRE between the teacher and the students.

In the IRE pattern the teacher initiates (I) a conversation; the students respond (R); and the teacher utters evaluating remarks (E) as indicated in Excerpt 1. (very good)

Excerpt 1. An example of IRE

1. Teacher: Does anybody know the plural of “wife”?  
3. Teacher: Very good

In this format, the teacher initiates a sequence of conversation with a known-answer question, one or more students respond with answers, and the teacher ends by providing evaluations, either positive (e.g., “Good”) or negative (e.g., “No, that’s not correct”). In this pattern the teacher is the main figure who decides when and who can have the chance to talk and if the responses from the students are relevant to the theme of conversation.

More recently, researchers have looked more closely at the IRE and, based on their findings,
have suggested a reconceptualization of this pattern. Earlier, there were studies that showed a different understanding of the IRE. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) referred to the third move of the pattern as Follow-up, and Mehan (1979) and others called it Evaluate. In a discourse structure model they developed, Sinclair and Courtland made a distinction in the third part of the pattern between the Evaluate act and Comment act, explaining that the teacher’s initiation leads to students’ response and the students’ response in turn results in the teacher’s feedback. However, they remained bound to the IRE, and full-scale reconceptualization of the IRE has not been done until recently.

Wells is one researcher who conducted a reevaluation of the IRE. His study (1993) was held in a third grade classroom “in order to gain a better understanding of the various functions performed by the discourse genre of triadic dialogue” (p. 1). The study shows that within an interaction of IRE which usually allowed the teacher to control students’ participation, some changes were clearly recognizable. These changes were explicit especially in the third part of the interaction, and stimulated more active participation among students. In this third part, the teacher checked the students’ knowledge of the material they were handling during class, a typical evaluation. However, in dealing with certain topics, the third move functions much more as an opportunity to extend the students’ questions, to draw out its significance, or to make connections with other parts of the students’ total experience during the lesson. Wells termed this a follow-up.

Excerpt 2. An example of IRF

4. T: Here the picture (a cartoon of children doing an activity) suggest that you can clap, but are there other ways that you can use to figure out how long it takes for the bottle to empty?
5. S: Stamp your feet.
6. T: Stamp your feet, good...another way?
7. S: Er... snap
8. T: Snap... Ok, besides using your hands and feet, what other methods can you think of?

Excerpt 2 shows that during the interaction the teacher asks for suggestions, evaluates student’s answers (#5, 7) and extends them (#4, 6, and 8). This three-part discourse could take a variety of shapes because the topic dealt with during the lesson can be co-constructed with a variety of ideas by the teacher and students, rather than being pre-selected only by the teacher (Wells, 1993).

Specifically, the functions of IRF pattern are also found in some recent studies conducted in
L2 classrooms. Consolo (2000) investigated nine Brazilian EFL classrooms and found that in the typical IRF pattern, teachers followed not only their agendas for the lesson, but also developed their topic according to students' responses.

Excerpt 3 (p. 102)

9. S: I think for women, thirty, thirty-two
10. T: At thirty-two you're a spinster? [stressed tone]
11. T: I don't know. I'll kill myself.
   ((students laugh))
12. T: the word that comes after spinster ((chuckle)) ok, what is... how old is spinster in Brazil? Thirty-two, you said?
13. F: for women or men?

The above excerpt 3 is an example of this kind of development. Rather than just teaching the meaning of the word "spinster," the teacher developed an interesting new topic (#12) based on the student's response (#9), the age of a spinster. This corresponds to Consolo's assumption that "the quality of teachers' classroom language can contribute to language development, inasmuch as it fosters regular patterns of classroom discourse that favor learners' verbal contributions and active participation in discourse" (p. 92).

In their study conducted in a classroom of American language and culture for international graduate and undergraduate students, Boyd and Maloof (2000) found that the classroom teacher can orchestrate and support a kind of classroom discourse that engenders active student talk, which leads to L2 learning based on the assumption that students learn through talking. This study examined classroom discourse in an ESL classroom and focused on the role of the teacher in facilitating extended discourse as an affirmer, questioner, and clarifier. By engaging students in IRF patterns, the teacher shaped the classroom discourse and consequently the type of language learning that occurred.

Excerpt 4 (p. 175)

14. S: I think this is because... the sociocultural influence, and it could be viewed as a cultural shadow.
15. T: I love that, where did you get that phrase?
   That's beautiful. Sociocultural Shadow. Does he use that phrase?

In Excerpt 4, when the student used the metaphor "cultural shadow" in his talk (#14), the teacher
interrupted to identify the source of this metaphor. In the process the teacher acknowledged and affirmed (#15) his selection of this phrase, even though she changed it from a "cultural shadow" to "sociocultural shadow." Even though the teacher did not necessarily extend the discourse to a developed stage of discussion, he/she was able to support the student's utterance by selectively acknowledging and incorporating student initiations into the classroom discourse, taking a major role in facilitating a better learning environment in the classroom.

IRF: the reconceptualized interaction pattern of the IRE, is very prevalent in the classroom. In particular, the third part of this pattern, the follow-up, can have multiple functions in developing further discussion based on student response. IRF can clarify, confirm, affirm, and extend students' responses, leading them to different modes. The teacher's follow-ups significantly contribute to facilitating students' participation in classroom activities. Based on the above studies, my study mainly aimed to find whether similar results are produced in a different setting, that of an adult intensive English program (IEP).

III. METHOD

1. Research Questions

The two research questions guiding this study were:
1) What are the typical patterns of interaction found in adult IEP classrooms?
2) How do teacher contributions facilitate student contributions?

2. Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in an adult classroom of an intensive English program at a southeastern American university. The classroom that was chosen for this study was an intermediate reading course. During the eight-week summer session, the class met five days a week, one hour a day, in a little classroom which was designed for a formal meeting or class. The class was taught by a male teacher, who has been teaching English to international students at this program for 15 years. At the time of study he had a reputation as an excellent and experienced classroom teacher who had an open mind toward international students regarding their diverse cultures and their needs as language learners. Four of the students - half of the class - were from Korea. The other four students were from Japan, Brazil and Colombia, and students' ages ranged from 19 to 29 years. Most of them enrolled in the IEP to prepare for their TOEFL or GRE exams. Table 1 contains detailed information on each of the eight students.
Look Who’s Talking?

**TABLE 1**
Details of Participants (students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Academic Level &amp; (purpose)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hoon</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>College student (TOEFL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiwon</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>College student (TOEFL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuna</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>College student (GRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sujin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>College student (TOEFL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenji</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>High school graduate (TOEFL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miho</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>College student (TOEFL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>High school graduate (N/A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>High school Graduate (N/A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Joyce did not want her age revealed

3. Data Collection

1) Microethnography

Microethnography draws on perspectives and methods in ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and sociolinguistics. It is concerned with the local and situated ecology obtaining among participants in face-to-face interactional engagements, and constituting societal and historical experiences. Microethnography aims at describing how interaction is socially and culturally organized in particular situational settings (Garcez, 1997). Researchers of microethnography typically work with audiovisual machine recordings of naturally occurring social encounters to investigate in minute detail what interactants do in real time as they co-construct talk-in-interaction in everyday life. They also use the methodology for the investigation of face-to-face interaction and a particular point of view on language in use in complex modern societies (Erickson, 1992; McDermott, Gospodinoff & Aron, 1978).

2) Microethnographical Methods

Microethnography involves a narrow focus, offering a detailed analysis of only one type of event or even a single instance of an event, sometimes contrasted with a second type or instance found in another context (Shultz, Florio & Erickson, 1982). Due to its narrow focus, common to the approaches used in ethnographical studies is a resolute attention to detail and the use of quantitative as well as qualitative data (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001). Considering its relevance to educational research, the microethnographic approach can be termed as a form of educational ethnography frequently conducted in educational settings. The methods involved, known as microethnographical methods, are observation with field notes including video and
audio taping, and interviews. Using such methods, my research investigated how the teacher and students use language in their social interaction in the narrow context of the classroom. I focused on the interaction occurring only in that setting, narrowing my focus on participants’ talk patterns.

For this research, data collection took seven weeks, one week short of the eight-week summer semester for personal reasons. My methods included two to three hours per week of classroom observation with two to three hours of video-taping plus audio-taping, an interview with the teacher in the middle of semester, and two student interviews, one individual interview at the beginning of the session and the other a group interview at the end. Field notes were taken during the observation. 17 hours of data were collected.

4. Data Analysis

1) Analytical Framework

17 hours of total data were analyzed by a form of analytical framework I came up with as I carried out initial rough analysis. My conclusions are indicated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**

Episodes (Launching, Reviewing, Discussion, Reporting, Lecturing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Info. Getting</td>
<td>Info. Back</td>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>Confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-Answer Qs</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Solicitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Counter-Inq.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Qs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, I divided the whole data into episodes according to themes of activities. I categorized activities according to five characteristics: Launching, Reviewing, Discussion, Reporting, and Lecturing. The teacher started the class with some opening information or pre-requisite information for the activity he was going to initiate (Launching). He sometimes went through what his students had done for the homework he had assigned on the previous day (Reviewing). He also frequently made time for Discussions in a large group, or in small groups for students to
conduct their own discussions. He usually called for a Reporting session after small-group discussions, and the students reported what they had done during these discussions. From time to time, the teacher delivered information in the form of a Lecture without asking for responses from the students.

In each episode, the teacher had three types of engagement (Initiation, Evaluation, Follow-up) and the students had one (Response). The teacher usually started conversations (Initiation) with lots of questions. His questions fell under four subcategories. He simply gathered information (Information Getting), asked questions for which he already knew the answers (Known-Answer Questions: e.g. What color is snow?), requested students to do something (Demanding), and sometimes asked students' original and personal ideas on certain topics (Authentic questions). The teacher continued the conversation after students' responses by providing Evaluations or Follow-ups. He evaluated their responses with Acknowledgements or Rejections, and followed up in six ways: he confirmed students' responses by reiterating, sometimes with additional information (Confirmation); asked students for more information to move on to the next phase (Solicitation); clarified confusion among students (Clarification); developed more concepts from students' responses (Extension); provided indirect correction by reformating students' incorrect answers (Reformation); and also provided additional information related to his prior personal and cultural knowledge (Association/Connection). Students responded to the teacher (Response) in three different ways according to the type of question. They responded with the information the teacher wanted (Information Back), or merely accepted what their teacher said (Acceptance), and sometimes posed questions when they needed to clarify confusions (Counter-Inquiry).

IV. FINDINGS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION

Interactions among participants were organized around five instructional episodes: discussion, reporting, launching, reviewing, and lecturing. The teacher employed several combinations of these episodes according to the topics and content he chose for the day. Table 2 indicates the percentage of each category accounts for the total episodes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of Episodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 (37.10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 3 below, almost all the interactions between the teacher and the students, whether they were simple or complicated, were characterized by one main pattern, the IRF. A variation of the IRE was also found but occurred much less frequently. The teacher typically initiated the interaction, the students responded to his initiation, and the teacher made a follow-up remark, such as posing a further questions. On occasion he provided an evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IRE</th>
<th>IRF</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 (6.05%)</td>
<td>528 (93.95%)</td>
<td>562 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher and the students participated in 562 sequences of on-task interactions. Overall, IRF sequences dominated almost 94% of the whole interaction. Excerpt 5 and 6 are examples taken from the data.

Excerpt 5. IRF Sequence

1. T: Have you heard of Atlantis?
2. Kenji: Have you...?
3. T: Have—you—heard—of—Atlantis?
4. Kenji: Yeah, I went to Atlanta
5. T: I said ATLANTIS

Excerpt 6. IRE Sequence

1. T: How many important ants are there?
2. Mi: Ah, important! Two
3. T: Yeah. Two.

Each discourse pattern had four kinds of initiations: Information-Getting Question, Known-Answer Question (K-Ans Qs), Demanding, Authentic Question (Auth. Qs); three kinds of students’ responses: Information Back, Acceptance, and Counter-Inquiry to each of the teacher’s utterances; two kinds of evaluations: Acknowledgement and Rejection; and six kinds of follow-ups from the teacher: Confirmation (Confirm), Solicitation (Solicit), Clarification, Extension, Reformation, and Association/Connection. The tables provided below explain specific information of each category.
TABLE 4
The Number of Initiations (1st row) and Students’ Responses to them (2nd row)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Info-Getting</th>
<th>K-Ans Qs</th>
<th>Demanding</th>
<th>Auth. Qs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>372 (59.52%)</td>
<td>128 (20.48%)</td>
<td>64 (10.24%)</td>
<td>61 (9.76%)</td>
<td>625 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>323 (86.83%)</td>
<td>149 (116.41%)</td>
<td>54 (84.38%)</td>
<td>53 (86.89%)</td>
<td>579 (92.64%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 provides figures that show weekly proportions of Initiations by each category. A total of 625 Initiations were provided by the teacher. *Information Getting* (Info-G.) accounted for over a half of the total initiations (59.52%). *Information-Getting* was used by the teacher to ask for simple information, to review homework, and to receive reports from the students on what they discussed during the small group activities (e.g., Do you have questions?). *Known-Answer questions* (K-Ans.) accounted for the second largest portion of total initiations (20.48%). This type of initiation is characterized by the nature of its questions. The teacher asked students questions about what he already knew in an effort to elicit more talk from the students (e.g., What do you do with your nose?). *Demanding* (Dem.) initiations accounted for 10.24% of the total number of Initiations. These were characterized by their function of strongly requesting rather than merely asking information. This form of initiation was used by the teacher to request that the students do something. The category with the lowest number of Initiations was *Authentic Questions* (9.76%). Authentic Questions were a type of question used for eliciting genuine independent responses from the students. For example, the teacher asked students their personal opinions on a situation in a movie (e.g., What would you do if you were in that situation?).

As can be seen in the second row of Table 4, overall, students responded to almost all the teacher’s initiations (92.64%). Among the four categories of initiations, *Known-Answer Questions* elicited the most responses from the students, even beyond the number of the teacher’s initiations of this category (116.11%), implying that some of teacher’s questions in this category got more than one answer. The second most frequent category was responses to *Authentic Questions* (86.89%). *Information-Getting Questions*, accounting for the largest portion of Initiations, elicited as many student responses as *Authentic Questions* (86.83%). The number of responses to *Demanding Initiation* accounted for the lowest percentage, but not by far when compared with the previous two categories (84.38%).

TABLE 5
The Number of Evaluations (1st row) and Students’ Responses to them (2nd row)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acknowledgement</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>115 (99.14%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.86%)</td>
<td>116 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 (44.35%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>51 (43.97%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Table 5, only one Rejection was found over the entire data. In other words, the teacher almost never gave his students any negative feedback. When the teacher agreed with the students’ response, he gave the students Acknowledgements (e.g. Good). The percentage of Acknowledgement was 99.14%, showing that the teacher almost always provided positive evaluations.

Since Evaluations by the teacher in this data were used almost only as acknowledgements of students’ responses to his initiations, few further responses were made by the students. Compared to the percentage of responses to Initiations (92.64%), the number of responses to Evaluations was sparse (43.97%).

| TABLE 6 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Confirm. | Solicit | Clarif. | Extent. | Reform. | Asso./Con. | Total |  |
| 432(37.11%) | 246(21.13%) | 238(20.45%) | 172(14.78%) | 45(3.87%) | 31(2.66%) | 1,164(100%) |  |
| 239(55.32%) | 265(107.72%) | 185(77.73%) | 87(50.58%) | 34(75.56%) | 18(58.07%) | 28(71.13%) |  |

As seen in Table 6, when the students responded the teacher confirmed their responses by reiterating what they said, solicited more information, clarified any concepts they found confusing, extended their limits with further knowledge, reformed what they said when it took a wrong direction, and associated their response with his personal or cultural knowledge. Indeed, Confirmation, confirming and supporting the students’ answers, made up over one third of total follow-ups (37.11%). The teacher provided this form of follow-up by reiterating students’ answers with some additional information. This feature was used more during review and reporting sessions consisting of true and false questions and simple comprehension checks. Solicitation accounted for the second largest portion (21.13%). At times, the teacher solicited more information after his students answered his question. Solicitation came in the form of questions which are also divided into categories. These categories follow those of initiations. For Clarification the teacher clarified students’ confusion regarding the material, or any other questions. This category accounts for nearly twenty percent of the total follow-ups (20.45%), or the third highest among follow-ups. Extension, when the teacher added more information based on students’ responses, took fourth place among follow-ups (14.78%). The teacher extended the students’ answer with much more related information. In Reformation, a way of correction without saying “no,” the teacher provided a positive recast when the students failed to follow teacher’s instruction or provided wrong answers. From time to time the teacher also provided additional information related to his prior personal and cultural knowledge, Association/Connection. This smallest category accounted for only 2.66% of total follow-ups.

According to Table 6, even though the percentage of students’ Responses to the teacher’s
Follow-ups (71.13%) was not as high as the percentage of Responses to Initiations (92.64% in Table 4), the number of students’ elicited Responses From Follow-ups was far more than those from Initiations. However, there were marked differences among the six sub-categories of Follow-ups. According to Table 6, around 50-60% of Confirmations, Extensions, and Associations/Connections secured students responses (55.32%, 50.58%, 58.07% respectively), but the other three, Solicitations, Clarifications, and Reformations, were relatively more effective in eliciting students’ corresponding utterances (107.72%, 77.73%, 75.56% respectively). Solicitations showed the most striking figures, 107.72%, which indicates that more than one students’ response came after each Solicitation.

**TABLE 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Information-back</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Counter-inquiry</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,206 (82.71%)</td>
<td>129 (8.85%)</td>
<td>123 (8.44%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,458 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**V. FURTHER DISCUSSION**

Based on these findings, I will present some particularly interesting points. First, among four kinds of Initiations, Known-Answer questions took a significant percentage of total initiations. Researchers have criticized this approach due to their overuse of the teacher and lack of opportunities for students to ask questions during interaction. However, as this study shows, *Known-Answer Questions* might have an important role in carrying on the stream of the conversation. Because it is assumed that the amount of talk elicited from the students indicates the degree of their understanding and learning, the teacher seemed to choose “asking” as a way of getting students to participate. As a result, Known-Answer Questions elicited students' responses most effectively. They might have felt more comfortable with these questions than with other Initiations because the students were able to answer sometimes by copying words and structures from *Known-Answer Questions*, as shown by. Excerpt 7. There the teacher asks a comprehension-check question after watching a movie. Since the movie showed a rowing-boat scene, his question regarding who rowed the boat is considered a *Known-Answer Question* (#1).

**Excerpt 7. (Known-Answer Questions)**

1. T: He wanted to row. **Was he allowed to row?**
2. Maria: No, Mr, Nolan allowed to, Mr. want(?), want Todd to do soccer?
Second, the teacher almost never gave negative evaluations to the students. Even when the students presented incorrect answers, he recast or raised another question based on their answers. Reformation and Solicitation forms in Follow-ups also reflect this teacher's "never no" tendency.

Excerpt 8. (Reformation)

3. Maria: Well prepared...

4. T: Well prepared

Excerpt 9. (Solicitation)

5. T: What do you think that means? Attempts to cash in on the same...

6. Hoon: Keep in...

7. T: Sorry?

8. Hoon: Keep in?

9. T: Keep in? What do you mean keep in?

The teacher may have said "not correct" or "no" in both Excerpt 8 and 9 situations but he seemed to keep the conversation going. Teacher's follow-up #4 functions as a kind of recast with no overt rejection of the student's structurally incorrect response (#3). When Hoon responded (#6) with information irrelevant to the intention of teacher's question (#5), the teacher did not dismiss Hoon's answer; rather he asked back to find out why Hoon answered that the way he did (#9). It is not surprising to see a very low percentage of students' Responses to Evaluations, considering the function of Evaluation which usually finishes a sequence of talk between the teacher and the students. It may be hard for the students to feel comfortable in raising any kind of questions or response to "finishing-up" remarks.

Third, since the major function of Follow-ups is to lead the students into another phase of conversation, the teacher often provided a great deal of Follow-ups instead of simple Evaluations. Perhaps aware of "The more talk the better the learning" assumption, he most frequently Confirmed students' responses by reiterating them and often provided brief additional information supporting the students' responses to provide a wider context where the students' answers could be situated as more relevant and solid.

Excerpt 10. (Confirmation)

10. Hoon: Ready to join.

11. Sujin: [ready to join]

12. T: Ready to join. Who had a problem with grades? Who is struggling to
Look Who’s Talking?

keep their grades up?


14. T: What about Todd? Did Todd participate, Hoon?

The number of Responses to Follow-ups was indeed larger than all other types of Responses, but the percentage rate of Responses to Follow-ups was not as high as those to Initiations, maybe because they included closing elements with directions leading to another phase or plateau of discussion. Confirmation, Extensions, and Associations/Connections were relatively less used in eliciting students’ responses than Solicitations. Clarifications, and Reformations in that the former three categories of follow-ups tended to close a sequence of conversation with additional information while the latter categories left room for possible responses from the students. Solicitations were most successful in enticing students’ responses. The major reason for this high percentage is their characteristics as questions that were a basic form of Initiation.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study points to several conclusions. First, my research demonstrates that a teacher’s contributions during interaction elicit different kinds of talk from the students. The teacher in this study provided various kinds of contributions in Initiations and Follow-ups. Each contribution drew different responses from the students. The teacher, being aware of the importance of talk in the language learning classroom, tried to make the students participate as much as he could. One prominent strategy he used was asking questions. The teacher usually initiated the interaction with inquiries. In this study, the teacher asked questions not just to initiate the interaction but also to provide follow-ups that led the students a step further. When he was not satisfied with the answer he received from the students, he solicited a variety of answers that corresponded to the learning goal of each activity. By asking questions, the teacher sometimes elicited from the students both simple, monotonous information including what he already knew, as well as highly independent original opinions. The teacher’s questions sometimes triggered inquiries among the more curious students. The teacher’s contributions facilitated learning by eliciting a variety of responses from the students.

The second point this research indicates is a reevaluation of Known-Answer Questions, one of the frequent forms of inquiry used by teachers. Known-Answer Questions, also called display questions, have frequently been criticized by researchers for their overuse by classroom teachers because they request information that the teacher already knows and that,
sometimes, students are presumed to know. However, this study suggests a different perspective for two reasons. First, Known-Answer Questions are very effective in eliciting responses from the students, because in many cases the students know the answers. Thanks to the less complicated nature of Known-Answer Questions, the students answered with confidence, enabling the teacher to continue and keep the stream of conversation. In addition, Known-Answer Questions often provide linguistic structures that can be models for the students to copy when they design their responses. The teacher in this study often asked Known-Answer Questions that included model structures close to the answers he wanted, and the students took advantage of them to figure out these answers. They might indeed be short, but model structures in Known-Answer Questions are valuable in that learners not only copy them but also learn new information from them.

The third important point in this study is the "never say no" tendency of the teacher. The teacher almost never evaluated the students’ answers negatively. Instead of "no," the teacher accepted even irrelevant answers and asked again to find out what the intention of those answers was, or repeated them in corrected form. The teacher’s reluctance to use "no" served an important role in facilitating more participation among the students, encouraging them to speak out freely.

All findings from this study show that talk is the main device used for language learning in this classroom, that the teacher is the major figure who talks the most and controls the class, and that the responses from the students are different according to the characteristics of the teacher’s Initiations and Follow-ups. Students’ learning behaviors depend on how the teacher interacts with them. The significance of teacher interactions, which was noted in many previous studies, can also be drawn from this present study of adult ESL learners in an IEP classroom.

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