Turn Sequence and Classroom Discourse: IRF and its Role in Language learning

Nagham Oudeh Alhamdwee

Reem Zead Khalif

College of Education for Women || Al- Iraqia University || Iraq

Abstract: Classroom discourse is considered an important aspect of learning and teaching the new language. The turn sequence is one type of classroom discourse and it's considered as an important way to learn the skill of speaking the English Language, and one type of classroom discourse is the (IRF) pattern. IRF pattern is an abbreviation for (teacher initiation, students' response, and feedback or follow up by (teacher or student). This research focuses on discussing classroom discourse and the (IRF) pattern as an important way to discover the role of it in learning the English Language. It also focuses on the teacher's role, as the dominant power of discourse inside the classroom and how to use the (IRF) pattern to encourage students to participate in different activities inside their classes. Data were collected from a regular English Language Learning classroom, and then the data were transcribed and analyzed to show how the (IRF) pattern was used in the classroom. The results showed that the use of turn sequence and the IRF pattern was very useful to stimulate and encourage students and learners of English Language to participate by talking about different things inside the classroom either between their teacher and themselves or between the students but by the help of the teacher.

Keywords: turn sequence, Initiation, response, feedback, classroom discourse, teacher role.

دور التسلسل الدوري في الخطاب الصفي: (الابتداء، الاستجابة والمتابعة) في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

نغم عودة جاسم

ريم زيد خلف

كلية التربية للبنات || الجامعة العراقية || العراق

المستخلص: يعتبر الخطاب الصفي جانبًا مهمًا في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وتدريسها. تسلسل الدور هو أحد انواع طرق التخاطب داخل الفصل الدراسي ويعتبر طريقة مهمة لتعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزي ويعتبر نمط (IRF) أحد انواع التخاطب داخل الفصل الدراسي وهو اختصار لـ (بدء المعلم، استجابة الطلاب، وردود الفعل أو المتابعة من قبل (المدرس أو الطالب). يركز هذا البحث على مناقشة موضوع التخاطب داخل الفصل الدراسي وخصوصا استخدام نمط (IRF) كوسيلة مهمة لاكتشاف دوره في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، كما يركز على دور المعلم، باعتباره القائد المهيمن للخطاب داخل الفصل وكيفية استخدام نموذج (IRF) لتشجيع الطلاب على المشاركة في الأنشطة المختلفة داخل فصول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. تم جمع البيانات من فصل دراسي عادي لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، ثم تم نسخ البيانات وتحليلها لإظهار كيفية استخدام نمط (IRF) في هذا الفصل الدراسي. وأظهرت النتائج أن استخدام تسلسل الدور ونمط IRF كان مفيدًا جدًا في تحفيز وتشجيع الطلاب ومتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية على المشاركة من خلال التحدث عن أشياء مختلفة داخل الفصل سواء بين المعلم والطلاب أو بين الطلاب فقط بمساعدة المعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التسلسل الخطابي، الابتداء، الاستجابة، المتابعة، دور المعلم.

Introduction.

The prototypical interaction between teacher- student consists of three- part sequences. This sequence, generally known as teacher initiation, learner response, and teacher or students follow- up or feedback and, it is usually abbreviated IRF, I for teacher initiation, R refers to student response and F to follow up or feedback. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) were the first that talk about teacher- students discourse inside the classroom according to a sequence called the (IRF) pattern (as cited in Mehdi & Nadir: 2016.1764).

There is a constant public interest in developing teaching methods for teaching and learning any language because people in general want to develop their children's ways of thinking and learning the second language especially English Language as it is became a universal language. Experts in teaching languages looked every year for new methods of teaching, to make the learning process more useful, interesting, and easier. So the teachers of languages especially English Language tried to make their classes more active by giving their students the chance to try speaking inside the class. A communicative classroom seeks to promote 1- interpretation 2- expression, and 3- negotiation of meaning, so learners must be active not just reactive in the classroom of learning English Language or any other language (Kumaravadivelu: 1993.18). In general teachers of English Language, especially in the classes of EFL learners (English as a foreign language), must encourage their students to ask questions, seek for new information and new words, and express their opinion; IRF pattern is one way of learning or teaching a second language successfully.

Literature Review.

Previous studies on teacher- student interaction discovered a typical style of interaction (Cazden, 1988; Lemke, 1985; Mehan, 1979), in which the teacher initiates the lecture (talks), the students respond, and the teacher then provides evaluations or feedback. "Traditional classroom discourse patterns include three turns: teacher initiation (ask a question), student responses (answer the question, seek clarification, and seek word meaning), and teacher feedback or comment (F). (Mehan, 1979. 23) stated that "The IRF structure accounts for up to 70% of all classrooms speaking, and is typical of classroom discourse" according to Wells (1993, 1999) While Walsh (2011) pointed out that IRF sequence can be found in classrooms all over the world"

By asking questions, offering instructions, or giving details, the first stage in each classroom discussion is initiated. Teachers inside their classes dominate and direct the class; they ask the majority of questions, call on learners to respond, and assigns turns. The teachers urge their students to speak up and participate actively in the learning process. There are two types of initiation in the IRF sequence either the teacher speaks constantly and asks all of the questions, performing all of the initiation in front of the entire

class, or he use the responses of the students to certify that the learning process is taking place (Sinclair, 1982: 32).

Teachers can initiate the class in a variety of ways, including:

1- Asking questions.

2- As a recall of the former lesson, give a brief quiz at the beginning of class.

3- Organizing small- team meeting for learners (two or four students per group).

4- Instruct learners to ask questions regarding what they learned in the past lesson

5- Students ask about anything they don't understand or a problem they're having performing their homework. (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 189).

Students' responses can range from relatively responses such as "yes, no" or a single- word response to extended statements. To help learners improve their skills and motivate whole- class interaction, language teachers frequently ask a short sequence of questions.

Feedback is another learning aspect of teaching, be it negative or positive, it can be done by the teacher, take the form of (good, that's right, O.K) and it serves to:- Let learners know how well they have performed, and to increase students motivation and build a supportive classroom discourse between the teacher and his students. Feedback on the substance or manner of an utterance of what a learner has responded to include: focus on the structure, refreshments, prompts, input from meta- linguists, requests for explanation and repetition (Nassaji & Wells 2000). Good feedback examples include:

1- The following day return an exam or assignment.

2- Immediately give oral answers to factual queries.

3- Instant oral answers to misunderstandings by the pupil

4- Provision of flash cards to study the facts (providing instant right/false feedback.

Research Questions

1- What is the role of IRF in learning English Language?

2- What is the role of the teacher in the classroom?

3- How can we build an active Language learning classroom?

Data collection

The researcher collected the data from an (EFL) classroom of second stage in the department of English language, College of Education for Women, Al- Iraqia University. The researcher audio recorded the lecture on Thursday 6 Nov. 2018 at 9 O'clock. The researcher came at 8: 30 in the morning before the students came, and sit in the middle of the class, so he would have a good place to record the entire lecture. The researcher tried to record everything concerning how many students were in the class, and how many males and females.

Methodology.

The researcher used qualitative data analysis to transcribe the extracts taken from the English language classroom discourse, to show the three- turn sequence in this classroom, between the initiation of the teacher, response of the students and feedback of the teacher or the students. It shows how the classroom activities are progressing.

Participants:

The participant of this study is a teacher of one regular second year English class in English Language Department, College of Education for Women- Al Iraqia University. The researcher audio recorded the whole of a class session to capture data, which reflect focused areas of the study. The researcher sought the permission of the class teacher to be in the class during the recordings, in order to be observant while taking notes of the required data through unobtrusive observation. The participants were (28) female students. The teacher divided the classroom into two groups A and B to make all the students participate in the classroom activities.

Data analysis and results.

In this study, the researcher attempted to analyze data transcripts from an English language learning classroom. The researcher looked into the frequency with which the teacher and students exchanged information and the turn sequence during the lecture on a qualitative level.

The researcher examined the data to examine the roles of both the instructor and the student in order to determine how teachers can improve their teaching practices by using language in the classroom, and how students can learn English or any other language by participating in classroom discourse.

The teacher here tried to stimulate his students by attempting to engage them to participate in classroom activities by posing a question and requiring the entire class to answer the question through group work. He was attempting to assist students in their language acquisition specially speaking. He tries to get students to make course plans. The results also demonstrate that the entire class was involved in improving the teacher- student connection inside the classroom. But as we can see from the results that the teachers were the only and sole person how can imitate the lesson and the only one who ask the questions

Discussions.

The teacher begins the lecture by informing the class about the recording of the lecture by the researcher and his colleagues, then he gives the topic of the lecture and a clarification of what is going on today, in order to elicit positive responses from the students. He begins or initiates the lesson by reviewing

what they took the previous week. The table below contain teacher – students' portion of using of IRF pattern inside the classroom

Table (1) No. of using (IRF) inside the classroom by the teacher and the students

Teacher initiation (I)	No.	Students response R	No.	Follow up (F)
Asking Questions Clarifying	6 (teacher) 3(teacher & students)	Answering Giving more details	5 (students) 3 (students)	3 (teacher) 3(students)

Data one: (1- 5)

"T: Right today we are going to look at describing the personality. Before we start, we have four visitors this morning, they are postgraduate students here in our department, and they want to record this lesson for the purpose of their own assignment of postgraduate course: so, act normally, do not do anything different to what normally do. "

In the first sentence, the teacher is clarifying the topic to his students; he stated that they are going to discuss (the meaning of the word personality) and what will happen during the lesson. He informs them about the new visitors (the researcher) then, again tell his learners about the topic that they are going to discuss again. Till now the teacher is taking the leading role in the classroom, he initiates the lesson and still talking and clarifying, without giving any chance to his students to say anything.

Data two: (6- 11)

"T: today we are going to first review what we have done last week. We are going to think about coherence again and we are going to think about describing personality. There are lots of words that you need to learn for describing people and how people act and that's what we are going to look up today (.......coughing....) First of all, caught, excuse me, also I need your help today, I think I'm going down with cold today so please, I HHHH, yes please don't make me work hard today.

In these lines, the teacher is continuing to describe the lesson, by clarifying the topic and goals of the lesson. Till now, teacher is the dominant power inside the class, he is the only one to speak in the classroom and still giving clarifications to the learners.

From the beginning of the lecture, from line (1- 11) we can see that the teacher is the only person who control the lecture, and he starts the lecture by clarifying the new subject, and what would happen in the lecture so far.

From Line (9) teacher started with the first question and we have the first response from the learners about the topic of the lesson, learners' response actively of what teacher had asked with the answer: Personality."

Data (12- 25)

From line 12 to the end of the discourse, there would be different types of questions by the teacher and active responses (answers) from the learners, and the interaction of turn taking is going on

progressively, making this lesson a very active lesson, and we can see the (f) pattern as an active followed up by the teacher after each answer from the students with asking another question immediately.

The questions continue by the teacher in the following lines (9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19) with clarification as in line (2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 24, 25) when he gives feedback to the learners, as its shown in table (1) above, and at the same time clarify the meaning of his question in simple way, to make the learners understands what he wants exactly. Students responses are just answering for the questions of the teacher or commenting or adding to their friends answers in lines (11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 1)

ST: I like to travel in airplane and erm.... and make friends.

T: O.K. good, the question, is like what you like usually?

ST: I like to have new tastes of food, learning new habits.

T: That's great. And what else, what you like to do if you were in a new society?

ST: mmm, I would definitely want to show the habits of my own country, and maybe show the other sides of my countries traditions.

All of these interactions between the teacher and his students are a good example of IRF pattern and it shows the activity of English Language learning classroom. We can see also that the teacher asks a known answer questions to the learners. The reason behind doing this is to make the learner answer quickly or respond in a short time.

Discussion.

From lines (1- 9) the teacher was attempting to provide feedback and clarification to his students by modifying the meaning of the questions he asked to ensure that his students understand exactly what he wants. Language acquisition takes place in the classroom, where the teacher and the students are constantly interacting.

(Wells, 2001) stated that "Through classroom interaction, knowledge is constructed and reconstructed between participants in specific situations, using the cultural resources at their disposal, as they work toward the collaborative achievement of goals that emerge in the course of their activity.

Role of the teacher is important; because he does everything; he could to facilitate the appropriate learning environment in his classroom, and provide conditions that encourage or restrict Successful student participation (Hall, 1998).

Every student has an equal opportunity to engage in the lesson; therefore, IRF is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate the activity of the lesson while reducing the teacher's authority in the classroom and allowing his pupils to take a more active role in the interaction.

Conclusion:

In college English classes, the normal pattern of discourse was teacher initiated student response and teacher evaluation. The findings revealed that the English teacher was successful in motivating students to participate.

Teachers worked hard to encourage their students to participate in classroom activities and communicate with one another. We can see how the teacher made use of their participation. According to the data analysis above, the teacher was the one who dominated the classroom. The teacher spoke for the majority of the time.

The matter was kept under control. As a result, he asks all of the questions. The students are simply responding the questions. There may be more. Learners take an active role in classroom discussions. Such objectives are possible. Some of the methods for getting there include role- playing, storytelling, and debating.

In other words, increasing student participation in the classroom and allowing students to run their own classroom with the help of the teachers. It's difficult to merely act as a guide and organizer, but it's not impossible.

We can't say that the IRF pattern has no defects, one of its defects is that teachers are the only one that control the class and he talked more than his students, he didn't give them enough time to think about possible answers to his questions. The researcher found also that most of the teachers talk was asking questions that need short answers by the learners, and here also, the learner had no enough time to try to thing about new answers

References.

- Cazden, C. (1988). Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning.

- Hall, J. K. (1998). Differential teacher attention to student utterances: the construction of different opportunities for learning in the IRF. Linguistics and education. 9(3).

- Haradasht & Aidinlou. (2016). A Case Study on EFL Classroom Discourse: International journal of humanities and cultural studies.

- Hossain, Nassaji & Gordon Wells, 2000. "What's the use of triadic dialogue?" An investigation of teacher- student interaction in Applied Linguistics.

- Jack C. Richards & Charles Lockhart, (1999). "REFLECTIVE TEACHING IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS". Cambridge language education press.

- Kumaravadivlu, B (1993). Maximizing learning potential in communicative classroom. ELT Journal. Volume 47. Issue1.

- Lemke, J. L. (1985). Using language in the classroom. Geelong, Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

- Mehan, H. (1979). Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom. Cambridge. MA: Harvard University Press.

- Oya Ozemir Yildiz Technical University ozemir@yildiz.edu.tr.

- Sinclair, J. and Coulthard, M. (1992). Towards an analysis of discourse. In M. Coulthard (ed.). Advances in spoken discourse analysis. London, UK: Routledge.

- Sinclair, J.M.& Coulthard, M. (1975). "Towards an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils. London", UK: Oxford University Press.

- Walsh, S. (2011). Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action. New York: Routledge.

- Walsh, Steve. "Language Teaching Research: Construction or obstruction: teacher talk and learner involvement in the EFL classroom". (2002).

- Wells, G. (1993). Reevaluating the IRF sequence: A proposal for the articulation of theories of activity and discourse for the analysis of teaching and learning in the classroom. Linguistics in Education

- Wells, G. (1999). Dialogic inquiry: Toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Appendix

1- T: Right today we are going to looking at describing the personality.

2- T: Before we start, I would like to introduce to you, four visitors this morning.

3- T: They are postgraduate students here in our department, and they are to record this lesson for the purpose of their own assignment of postgraduate course.

4- T: So, act normally; do not do anything different to what you normally do.

5- T: today we are going to first review what we have done last week.

6- T: We are going to think about coherence again and we are going to think about describing personality.

7- T: there is lots of words that you need to learn for describing people and how people act and that's what we are going to look up today

8- T: (.......coughing....) First of all, caught, excuse me, also I need your help today, I think I'm going down with cold today so please, I HHHH, yes please don't make me work hard today,

9- T: what's this question is asking about

10- ST: Personality.

11- T: Yes, personality. What would we say about personality?

12- T: Can you tell us something about your own personality

13- What do you like?

14- ST: I like to travel in airplane and erm…. and make friend.

15- T: O.K. good, the question, is like what you like usually?

16- ST: I like to have new tastes of food, learning new habits.

17- T: That's great and what else, what you like to do if you were in a new society

18- ST: mmmm, I would definitely want to show the habits of my own country, and maybe show the other sides of my countries traditions.

19- T: excellent, and what else do you want to do in the new society?

20- St: I would definitely learn the habits and rules of that society, its language, rules, and traditions.

21- St: May be I would make new friends from that society.

22- T: All of what you have said is a great and good idea so far.

23- T: I will add that reading books and learning about other societies is an excellent way to learn about other rules and traditions.

24- T: thanks for you all to participate and sharing your thoughts with me and with your friends here in the class.

25- T: remember, when you want to learn a language, try to think in a loud voice to strengthen your abilities in speaking in English Language.