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Collaborative Classroom Language Analysis Project

**Introduction**

The data were collected from the Penn state IECP reading course. The course offered five hours a week, its goal is to enhance students reading comprehension and vocabulary development. The participants were the IECP teacher and 10 students (1 Korean, 1 Kazakhstan, 1 Puertorican, 1 Turkish, and 6 Arabian) who enrolled in her class. The students’ level of proficiency is low-intermediate. The data is selected from a video recording of a 50 minutes class, two segments of the data is used. The first part of the data is an activity called “words in discussion” that students were asked to be in groups of three and discuss a series of questions and will be asked to response those questions with the use of the newly learned vocabulary. The second part of the data is the second activity called “introduction to vocabulary” that the students were asked to provide the part of speech of a vocabulary and choose the correct definition from three choices. Our research question is how the teacher manipulates classroom interaction differently based on varied pedagogical goals. We examined the question from the following four perspectives: Walsh’s (2011) SETT (self-evaluation of teacher talk framework) and the IRF exchange structure; Mercer’s (2000) types of talk; Wertsch’s (1985) scaffolding function of teachers’ questions. Within each perspective, the classroom interaction in two segments were analyzed and compared. From the data comparison, we found that the teacher’s pedagogical goals influenced her language use, which shaped classroom interaction and students’ participation.

**The functions of teacher’s questions**

In this section of the data analysis we are interested in looking at how the teacher used her questions as tools to reach her instructional goals of the two activities. Scaffolding is the support given by experts in order to support novices to reach the learning goals. The analysis of scaffolding functions of teacher’s questions would be based on Wertsch’s (1985) six types of scaffolding functions of teacher’s questions. The teacher would use the questions with different scaffolding functions based on the competence level of the learners in assisting them to complete a particular task. After analyzing the data we found that the first part “words in discussion” and the second part of the class “introduction of vocabulary” the teacher mostly used the questions with scaffolding functions during the “words in discussion” activity and mostly used display questions during the “introduction of vocabulary” activity.

The teacher’s choice of using questions that have scaffolding functions in the first activity could be due to her task goal which is to help learners use the newly learned words into discussion as well as students’ comprehensibility. In order to achieve the task goal, the teacher used Recruitment (R) to draw students’ attention to the task (lines 55-58) as well as ensuring student’s participation (lines 82-84). After the students’ response, the teacher often employed Direction Maintenance-Clarification Request (DM-CR) to ask for clarification and elaboration from the student (lines 30, 40, 66). By asking for clarification, the teacher created an interactional space and learning opportunities for students to express their ideas more clearly. Reduction in degrees of freedom (RDF) is used when students have trouble in providing correct answers and were used by changing vocabulary (lines 69-77).

The frequent use of display questions in the second part of the activity could be due to the task goal of the teacher. The task goal of the second part is for students to complete the vocabulary in context which is vocabulary comprehension and at that time the teacher was trying to finish the task within a limited time, therefore, the turn-taking and participation of the students are strongly controlled by the teacher through the use of excessive display questions to let the students show what they know from the textbook. Throughout the activity, the teacher mostly used the two display questions in asking students the part of speech of a vocabulary, such as in line 162 “what part of speech is it?” and asking students for the right answer from a list of choices in line 166 “Does it mean to take away, to be intelligent, or to give?”

In short, in the first activity the teacher used a lot of questions that have scaffolding functions which not only assisted students’ comprehension but also maximized students’ participation due to their characteristics of eliciting elaborated responses from students. However, in the second activity, with constant use of display questions, the teacher-student interaction were almost controlled by the teacher and the response from the students were close to recitation than the classroom conversation that were often created by questions with scaffolding functions. From the analysis of teachers’ questions we found that teacher’s task goals and time pressure will influence her use of questions and thus impacted students’ participation.

**SETT**

According to Walsh (2011), teachers could examine the classroom interaction through using the SETT (self-evaluation of teacher talk), by which the interaction process could be better understood and therefore facilitate teaching/learning. Walsh (2006) also mentioned that teachers’ use of language would influence the pedagogic goal and related international features of a mode, which refers to an L2 classroom micro context. Throughout the two parts of our dataset, it is obvious that the teacher’s use of language in different activities is aligned with diverse preference of modes, and which closely link to the pedagogical goals.

In the first part of the data, the teacher promoted the students’ discussion by using provided vocabularies. The overall fingerprint founded during this activity is the mode switching from managerial mode to material/classroom context mode, and back to managerial mode. Mode switches were initiated by the teacher and it started from managerial mode to material/classroom context mode, during which a couple of questions on textbook were discussed group by group, and elaborated students’ participation was elicited by the teacher’s follow-up questions. The teacher finished this group’s discussion activity by switching to managerial mode again.

T: I would like to ask you to group to give us a kind of a summary of what you discussed, ok? In response to just one question, how about question number 2? Did any group discuss this question in detail? Is your behavior usually (XXX) by logic or emotion? How many group had a conversation about this?((*two students raised his hand*)) Ok, can you tell me kind of the summary of your group? Is your group more logical or more emotional? The three of you

The former part of the above teacher’s turn was to explain the direction of the following activity, and she ended it with the confirmation check marker “ok”. The switch to material mode occurs in line 4, right after the discourse marker “ok” and reference to the textbook question.

Throughout the discussion activity, the material/classroom context modes dominate the interaction and the two of them tightly relate to each other. The reason why these two modes were put together in this discussion is because of the specific type of activity. Since the students’ discussion was based on the questions listed on the textbook. The teacher would firstly claim the question each time, which followed the material mode in which the language use center on the material they were using. The sample turn was that “Is your group more logical or more emotional” asked by the teacher, she read this question listed on the textbook to start this group’s discussion. However, within the discussion of each question, the teacher would employ a couple of extended questions to encourage the students to express themselves clearly. The teacher followed the classroom context mode in which she provided minimal repair, and gave content feedback to students. At the end, the teacher finished this group discussion activity by switching to managerial mode again.

A more detailed fingerprint hidden within the material/classroom context modes was that managerial mode would come into play if there were students try to break their conversational ground rules in this activity, in which discussion and responses should be given group by group. If there were someone, who was not a member of current group, tried to join the discussion, the teacher would jump to managerial mode by interrupting the student, and claimed that the student were not suppose to talk at the current moment. The teacher’s turns like “hold on, this is their group right now. We will come to your group later” could be found every time a student broke this rule.

Another detailed fingerprint founded within the general material/classroom context modes was that skill and system mode would be also employed by the instructor according to her immediate pedagogical goal.

T: So you think there are more things that are not benefits. Do you guys know a word we can use if it’s not a benefit?

In the above teacher’s turn, she concluded the student’s answer in the first part, and she switched to skill and system mode by clarification request of a specific word that they were using in their talk. It shows that the teacher thought the students were suppose to master the word “disadvantage”, therefore she switched the discussion topic from students’ opinions about certain question to the word form. The mode switch happened based on the teacher’s decision-making of immediate pedagogical goal.

To sum up, the teacher employed managerial mode to open up and close the group discussion activity, and material/classroom context modes dominate the process of discussion. Based on certain external factors such as the students’ interruption of conversational ground rule and the teacher’s immediate goal came out of their discussion, managerial mode and skill and system mode would take place temporarily.

In the second part of the dataset, the teacher was leading the students to learn new vocabularies. Compared to the first activity, the type of mode could be clearly observed that the teacher was sticking to skill and system mode in most of the time. The teacher employed the display questions like “What’s the part of speech” in each word explanation to invite the students to provide corrective feedback. Extended teacher turns scattered throughout this activity by which detailed word explanations were provided. Classroom context mode was occasionally employed by the teacher by which she tried to promote students’ involvement or elaborate her vocabulary teaching. In conclusion, the teacher’s choice of modes aligned with the different types of activities and her related pedagogical goals.

**IRF difference exchange structure**

Initiation – Response – Feedback, a.k.a. IRF, is an interactional pattern usually found between teachers and students in classrooms. Teachers initiate an opening remark (often a question), and then students respond to it; in the end, teachers give feedbacks as a conclusion or turn completion. According to Walsh (2011), IRF can help us “understand interaction in the classroom, and comprehend its special nature” (Walsh, 2011, p.20). Teachers can use IRF process to manage the flow of classroom interaction by assigning students turns to speak. However, sometimes the IRF pattern will be broken by students’ interruption or teachers’ accidentally overlook of students’ contribution. The length of each IRF turn may also be affected by the different time pressure.

In the video data that we transcribed, the IRF pattern appeared to be different between the first part (words in discussion) and the second part (introduction to vocabulary). In the first part, the class was divided into groups for discussion; the teacher controlled the turn-taking strictly to ensure equal student participation. As shown in line 23 - 38, the teacher asked one group to answer a discussion question on the textbook, and one student from another group tried to interrupt (line 37). The teacher stopped the student strictly by stating clear that this was not his turn to talk. On the contrary, in the second part of the class, while introducing vocabulary words from a new chapter, the teacher doesn’t seem to put that much efforts on controlling students’ turn of talking, but she used another strategies to maintain the classroom flow she wished to achieve. As shown in line 294 – 307, the teacher asked students if they found other forms of the vocabulary just taught. Someone answered “contribution”, and the teacher acknowledged this response by giving feedback (line 296-299). However, in line 300 and line 302, students’ replies were both ignored by the teacher. Even though the two students also tried to interfere, the teacher didn’t stop them directly, instead, she just overlooked and continue her own speech. In the first part of the class, even though some students tried to interfere, the IRF pattern was still maintained for the most part, but in the second part of the class, sometimes the IRF pattern was left incomplete like, IR, IRR, or II; teacher’s feedbacks are sometimes missing.

Another difference in IRF pattern between the two parts of class is, in the first part, the teacher’s initiation and feedback are both long, however, the initiation and feedback both become shorter in the second part when the teacher started to introduce new vocabulary. The length of students’ response remained short throughout the data. For example, in line 115 – 127. The teacher initiated questions in line 115 to encourage students to answer, and student responded in line 116. In line 117 – 119, the teacher gave feedback to students’ response, and this feedback induces the next teacher initiation in line 121. The connected initiations help construct a smoother flow of classroom communication and knowledge instruction. Nevertheless, in the vocabulary introduction activity, the teacher reduced the time in making the initiation and giving feedback. Fewer connections between each IRF was found in the second part. As in line 243 – 260, the teacher initiated by simply repeating the sentence on the textbook and expecting students’ reply from selecting the correct answer from the book. After students replied, she gave a short feedback that didn’t seem to encourage more elaboration from students. However, there’s also one student (S2) tried to elongate the conversation around the word “reputation”. The teacher first showed an interest in line 252 and 254 (the two sentences may be regarded as feedbacks here), but soon after she ended the conversation by overlapping S2’s speech, and she instantly jumped to the next vocabulary. Her feedback didn’t generate more space for further discussion.

The difference in the two parts of the class may be resulted from the difference in time pressure. In the first part, when the time still seems sufficient, the teacher tried to make sure that each student get the opportunity to speak in the class, therefore, she managed the class conversation flow very strictly, not letting anyone interfered others’ talks. However, in the second part, the teacher started to be aware that the time is running out, and she wished to achieve the goal of that day’s class which is to finish introducing the vocabulary words, she rushed through and selecting the receive information that only helps to reach the goal. Therefore, she overlooked some students’ response, and she even tried to interfere students’ talk to make a quick conclusion.

**Types of Talk**

In this section, types of talk will be identified and analyzed according to the pedagogical goals of this lesson. As mentioned above, the first data set is about student-teacher interaction after group discussion and the second data is about going over new vocabulary in a limited time. Briefly, cumulative talk and exploratory talk are detected in the first data, while there are no obvious types of talk that can be identified in the second data.

According to Mercer (2000), “cumulative talk is a type of talk that speakers build on each other’s contributions, add information of their own and in a mutually supportive, uncritical way to construct a body of shared knowledge and understanding” (p. 97). In this following excerpt, the teacher and students from group one constantly build on each other’s talk to discuss more emotional or more logical behavior. For example, in line 29-31, in responding to the question of being more logical or more emotional, S1 replied as “depends on situation”, and then the teacher followed by asking why to encourage S1 to talk more. In line 39-43, S1 wanted to express more about why sometimes we were more emotional or vice versa, but due to limited language ability, he chose the wrong word and thus led to some confusion. So the teacher enquired clarification, but S1 was lack of language competence at that moment to validate himself. Now, S2 jumped in the conversation and make S1’s meaning a little bit more clearly, so that the teacher got this group’s discussion. Right after S2’s utterance, the teacher helped to finish S2’s utterance and make it a complete thought. We think it is of great importance, especially for students with limited oral competence, that the teacher and students can think and talk together. In this way, students won’t feel too embarrassed since the teacher can help them to modify their utterance. Also, this kind of practice is good for creating a supportive and encouraging participation environment.

In the words and discussion part, exploratory talk can be found. Since in this class the teacher controls the conversational floor very strictly, we can only see either a piece of exploratory talk or a discursive revelation of the characteristics of exploratory talk. So when the students are trying to expand on their talking, the teacher usually took over the floor. For example, from line 64-69, the student said watching TV has no benefit at all. The teacher critically challenged this answer and encouraged him to explore the question one step further. Although a part of S4’s answer is inaudible, it can still be inferred that he is explaining. But the teacher quickly took over the conversation and made a repetition as a conclusion and started another subtopic.

Another sequence is very long and not a perfect example of exploratory talk, but it still counts as exploratory in our opinion. From line 102-145, five students are all contributing to the common goal of how to ensure success. Their answers to the question are very explicit. Moreover, students provided reasoning for their answer. One particular example of being exploratory is when the teacher asked students if they know about the flashcards in line 120-129. They were being spontaneous as the discussion went, but still teacher took up most of the talking.

For the second part, introduction of vocabulary, it is quite obvious that there is no any kind of the above talk. There are only some display questions that are dispersed in the whole section. For this reason, students had no opportunity to dispute what the teacher is talk, or to develop long interactive conversation with the teacher. Since the teacher was short of time and she had a teaching agenda to finish, she was pushing students to quickly go over these new words. In the whole second part, the teacher controlled the conversational ground rules even more strict and asking for the part of speech or asking for the meaning of a word are the typical question types. The teacher didn’t expect students to have very interactive response. Instead, students were expected to answer a fixed answer.

To conclude, the types of talk are very different in the first section compared to the second section. The first one is more interactive and more cooperative, while the second one is like a sole performance of the teacher.

**Conclusion**

From the data analysis through the four scopes, we found that the teacher’s language use have great influence on the teacher and students’ interactions, which further impact the amount students’ participation. Her use of language correlated with diverse tasks goals and other external factors. In the first activity, the teacher focused on the students’ oral communication with the use of newly learned vocabulary. Therefore, her language use facilitated students’ participation and students’ learning space was created. However, due to the task goal which mainly focused on linguistic forms (vocabulary) and the time pressure during the second activity, students had limited opportunities to take part in classroom discourse actively. In conclusion, different pedagogical goals would determine different classroom interaction patterns.

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