

ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION USING IRF PATTERN: A CASE STUDY OF EFL CONVERSATION CLASS

Risna Saswati

Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing LIA
Jalan Pengadegan Timur Raya No. 3 Pengadegan, Pancoran, South Jakarta 12770
risnasaswati@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The most common pattern in classroom interaction is teacher initiates the talk in the class, learners respond to teacher talk, and teacher responds by giving corrective feedback to the learners. From this pattern it explains teacher's dominance in the classroom interaction. Therefore, this study sheds lights on whether the use of Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) in teaching facilitates learner-initiated communication and gives learning opportunity for learners to engage in classroom interaction. The data were taken from recorded and transcribed classroom observation of a conversation class. The result of this study is the teaching using IRF pattern can facilitate learner-initiated communication and give opportunities for learners to engage in classroom interaction.

Key Words: IRF Pattern, learner-initiated communication, classroom interaction

ABSTRAK

Pola yang paling umum digunakan di dalam interaksi kelas adalah guru menginisiasi pembicaraan, siswa memberikan tanggapan atas guru, dan guru kembali memberikan tanggapan perbaikan kepada siswa. Pola ini menunjukkan dominasi guru pada saat melakukan interaksi proses pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian ini membahas pola interaksi IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) yang diaplikasikan pada kelas apakah pola interaksi IRF yang diterapkan oleh guru dapat memfasilitasi inisiasi siswa untuk berinteraksi di kelas dan memberikan kesempatan kepada siswa untuk berinteraksi di kelas. Data penelitian diambil melalui observasi di kelas Percakapan dimana interaksi di kelas antara guru dan siswa direkam dengan menggunakan video yang kemudian ditranskripsikan. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah pola interaksi IRF yang digunakan guru di kelas memfasilitasi siswa untuk melakukan inisiasi dalam berinteraksi di kelas dan memberikan kesempatan siswa untuk berinteraksi di kelas.

Kata Kunci: pola interaksi IRF, komunikasi inisiasi siswa, interaksi kelas

INTRODUCTION

There have been extensive investigations regarding the classroom interaction. Levinson (1983) as quoted by Walsh (2006) proposes that there are two major approaches to the study of classroom interaction: Discourse Analysis (DA) and Conversation Analysis (CA). The well-proponents of a DA approach to classroom interaction are Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). They state that the most particular character in classroom interaction is IRF structure or pattern. The organization of Initiation-Respond- Feedback (IRF) is the default interactional practice which is used extensively by the researchers to investigate classroom interaction (e.g. Hall, 1995, 1998, 2009; Christie, 2002; Seedhouse, 2011).

IRF pattern starts from teacher asks question, and the learner answers the question; then the teacher provides feedback to the answer given by the learner. It is expected that the learners will be helped by this type of interaction related to their interaction with teachers. The learners can negotiate meaning with teachers and teachers should facilitate this interaction by confirmation checks, clarification request, and comprehension checks (Mackey, 2012). She adds that negotiated meaning facilitates learning. Supposedly, it improves students' proficiency. Additionally, during the interaction, learners receive feedback on their language production. It is expected by receiving feedback, they can improve their proficiency.

Kumaravadevalu (1999) states that what happens in the classroom determines the degree to which the objectives of the lesson achieved. Therefore, the analysis of the classroom aims and events become central to any serious educational enterprise. Analyzing classroom interaction needs selection and mastery of the particular

tools. One of the tools used is the model of classroom interaction proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard. They add that the most character found in the classroom interaction is the pattern of IRF. The tool is the IRF pattern which is extensively used by researchers to analyze the classroom interaction.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) develop a model of classroom discourse in ranks and levels arranged in hierarchical order which are Lesson, Transaction, Exchange, Move and Act. The most character found in classroom interaction is Move which is IRF (Initiation, Response and Feedback). IRF is a sequence of teacher-student-teacher turn taking in the classroom. In the initiation (I) phase, the teacher usually asks questions, to which the students respond (R). Then, it is followed by feedback given by the teacher. Initiation is not always in the form of question. It can be a statement or imperative sentence. Its function is to open a conversation and stimulate the students to speak.

Initiation can be in the form of the negotiated meaning. Mackey (2102) states that negotiated meaning can be in the form of: 1) Confirmation Checks, it is the expressions designed to establish whether an utterance has been correctly heard or understood, e.g. *Is this what you mean?*; 2) Clarification Request, it is the expressions designed to obtain a better understanding of an interlocutor's previous utterance, e.g. *What did you say?*; and 3) Comprehension Checks, it is the expressions designed to verify that the speaker has been understood, e.g. *Did you get that?*

Moreover, initiation is mostly from the teacher. Teacher initiates the talk in the classroom. Regarding teacher talk, Cullen (1998) categorizes teacher talk to communicative and on-

communicative talk. The communicative teacher talk involves:

1. Teacher uses referential questions to learners in which he/she does not know the answers. The talk is considered genuine.
2. Content feedback is used when the teacher's responses to learners' contributions in the process of learning focuses on content. Teacher does not give responses to form of language.
3. Teacher uses speech modifications, hesitations and rephrasing in the teacher talk. He/she uses when explaining the lesson, asking questions, giving feedback, etc.
4. Teacher attempts to negotiate meaning with the learners, e.g. through repetition, request for clarification.

Conversely, there are four categories of teacher talk which are considered non-communicative, namely:

1. Teacher uses display questions excessively. Display questions are considered not genuine for the teacher has already known the answers. The reading comprehension questions are considered display questions.
2. Teacher uses form-focused feedback.
3. Teacher echoes learners' responses. They just repeat learners' answers without having attention to give feedback for the benefit of the class.
4. Teacher uses the pattern of IRF. Teacher's activity is predicted by the learners for it is default organization.

However, teacher can start from non-communicative ones and move to communicative talk in order to give learners input first before they share knowledge and experience related to the lesson learned. Feedback which is typically produced by teachers is to evaluate the responses given by the learners. The teacher is supposed to provide feedback to learner's responses

(Diaz, 2009). The purpose is to appreciate the learners for some good works done. Additionally, it serves to confirm that the learners have correct answers and to inform the class about the correct answers by echoing. The feedback can be in the form of a non-verbal response by jotting down the answers on board, repeat the learner's answer to confirm and to encourage further responses from students. It is to make learners engage in teaching and learning process. Feedback can be in the part of negotiated meaning (Mackey, 2012).

Quoted by Diaz (2009) Llinares-Garcia (2005) categorizes feedback into interactional feedback and pedagogic feedback. The former has no evaluative purpose. The teacher may comment on learners' answers. It is realized through teacher's expression of agreement, disagreement, or acknowledgment. The latter is to refer to feedback that evaluates the learners' answers positively and negatively and gives clues to learners. The pedagogic feedback has different scaffolding techniques: recast, elicitation, clues, negative evaluation, and reformulation.

Recast is defined as optional and alternative ways of expressing the same meaning or as responses to content rather than linguistic form (Mackey, 2012). The teacher is to repeat the learner's response as corrective feedback. For example: Student: *Why did you fell down?* Teacher: *Why did you fall down?* Student: *Fall down, yes.* Moreover, *Elicitation* is the teacher elicits learner's response by questions, asking for completion, and asking for repetition. *Clues* are defined as the comments, information, and questions given to learners so they can understand the material given. *Negative Evaluation* is to confirm the answer given by the learner. The question such as *Are you*

sure? Pull down? Yes? No? can be used to show that the learner answer correctly or not. Meanwhile, *Reformulation* is to repeat learner's utterance which is not finished yet since the learner cannot answer correctly or he or she is in doubt. These techniques are choices for teacher to give feedback to learners in order to make them talk, learning to talk.

Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) Pattern is believed to facilitate learner-initiated communication and learning opportunities (Sinclair, 1975). Walsh (2006) says that it is arguable. The pattern is a rigid structure to follow and it is applied well in 1960-1970ies in which the traditional classroom interaction is still found.

A study conducted by Li (2018) resulted that IRF had a potential to increase language learning opportunities. IRF model is categorized by IRF form-focused and meaning-focused model. It was found out that both teachers use L1 to engage in classroom interaction while in meaning-focused model, L1 was used by teachers to scaffold students' learning.

A study conducted by Rashidi and Rafieerad (2010) found that the interaction in the class varied; however, teacher still dominated the talk. Regarding discourse talk, the distribution of talk was fair. The use of rigid IRF pattern was found out and there was no difference in IRF pattern both female teachers and male teachers. Bhatta and Butterfield (2016) examined the use of IRF pattern used by a team-teaching context. IRF was found in a single teacher classroom. When it was used by a team-teaching, IRF pattern was used collaboratively.

All the previous studies used formal classroom and the skills were integrated. However, this study uses the data taken from conversation class in which students are supposedly more

active in classroom interaction. Teachers act as facilitator and are not supposedly to dominate in classroom interaction. Therefore, this study sheds lights on whether the use of Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) in teaching facilitates learner-initiated communication and gives learning opportunity for learners to engage in classroom interaction.

METHOD

The method adopted is a qualitative method in which it is to describe and to evaluate the IRF classroom interaction pattern whether or not the pattern can facilitate learner-initiated communication and learning opportunities for EFL classroom. The data were taken from classroom interaction of a Conversational Class 4 in a course in Depok. This study applied classroom observations which were video recorded taking 90x2 minutes. Two class sessions were observed. All the recordings are transcribed using verbatim technique.

The data analysis was started from identifying IRF pattern of the classroom interaction in the transcription, categorizing the interactional features and pedagogical aims that were to be achieved by the teacher, analyzing the talk of the teacher and students in order to find whether the pattern of the classroom interaction could facilitate good classroom communication and Evaluating the IRF pattern as the tool to analyze the classroom interaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment presents five extracts as data whose format of data transcription is not to refer to any reference. There is T for teacher, L for learner, and Ls for learners.

Data 1

- 1 T: What kind of food we can buy in *Hoka Bento*?
- 2 Ls: Japanese food
- 3 T: Okay Japanese food. Is there any Indonesian food or Western food?
- 4 Ls: (no answer)
- 5 T: What menu do you usually order in *Hokben*?
- 6 L1: Yakiniiku food
- 7 T: What is your favorite food?
- 8 L2: Chicken Teriyaki
- 9 T: Your children?
- 10 L2: They also like chicken teriyaki.
- 11 T: How about you? Do you like Japanese food? If you like Japanese food, what do you order?
- 12 L3: Chicken Teriyaki

Teacher introduces a new lesson to the learners by a display question about the food they can buy in *Hoka Hoka Bento* for short *Hokben*, a popular Japanese fast food restaurant in Jakarta. He initiates the conversation to elicit the name of the food, how to order, what to order, and terms related to what to eat for appetizer, main course and closing. The questions asked are varied from referential to display questions. The referential questions occur more than display ones and it is to promote the actual communication in the classroom. However, there is a display question in (3) that is not answered by learners for they are confused what to say. However, they do not ask question to the teacher. Teacher moves to another referential question. The responses given by the learners are their actual answers and it promotes communicative classroom interaction. The learner-initiated talk occurs in (10) *They also like chicken teriyaki* to confirm that the family likes it. The feedback phase does not occur. The type is Initiation and Response only.

Data 2

1. T: How about if you open page 62. Talking about food. We have here a group of food. I want you to think that you are preparing a menu for lunch. Set up a menu for a business lunch using pictures here. You start with appetizer, main course, desert, and beverage. You are going to have a business meeting and your job is to prepare the lunch. With your partner decide the menu for lunch. What are you going to start first, main course, desert, beverage...?
2. Ls: (Learners discuss the menu for lunch in 15 minutes. There is no interaction between teacher and learners). After sometime...
3. T: *Arif*, can you describe your menu samples?
4. L5: The starter is salad. The main course is steak. The desert is ice cream. The beverage is soft drink.
5. T: Okay. Salad, shrimp, ice cream, and soft drink.
6. T: How about you *Desi*? Describe your menu.
7. L3: Appetizer is shrimp rolls; main course is steak, ice cream for dessert. Beverage is ice tea.
8. T: So a shrimp roll is for appetizer. Steak is for main course. Ice cream is for desert. Ice tea is for beverage. And *cendana*?
9. L6: Appetizer salad, main course steak, desert cake, beverage ice tea.

In practice stage, the teacher initiates the conversation by giving direction to learners (1). He paraphrases the direction in the book. There is no response from the class. He dominates the class interaction. Since it is a conversation class, the teacher can form the IRF pattern to talk about direction to learners. He can use display questions to know whether the learners understand it or not. Questions can get responses more than statement.

Then, the learners take their time to do their activity. There is no interaction. The teacher does not create IRF pattern by asking question. After accomplishing the task, the answers are discussed starting from teacher initiates by asking referential questions. The learners respond and teacher gives feedback by echoing the learners' answers for the class benefit in (5 and 7). The teacher can vary the scaffolding techniques to give feedback. He can use negative evaluation to clarify the response. Otherwise, negotiated meaning can be his choice by offering other food as alternatives. He can use speech modification, hesitation, or rephrasing to gear communicative classroom interaction. The interaction is from non-communicative stage to communicative one. The recommended talk is:

Learner: The starter is salad. The main course is steak. The dessert is ice cream. The Beverage is soft drink.

Teacher: Good. That's interesting. Is there any alternative food for vegetarian or people on diet? Recently, people think being healthy is to reduce the food containing fat and cholesterol.

Learner: Yup. We have thought about it. We provide low-cholesterol food for people on diet and green tea for them. Don't worry. (This is expected answer).

Data 3

- 1 T: All of you use steak for the main course. Why do you choose steak?
- 2 L7: High protein. Provide you with a lot of energy.
- 3 T: Lydia used the perspective of a doctor. She prefers steak because it is rich of protein.

- 4 T: Protein? Not fat?
- 5 L: Protein
- 6 T: Desi. Why do you choose shrimp rolls for appetizer?
- 7 L3: Sometimes, I order shrimp rolls.
- 8 T: Okay.

It is still in the practice stage. Teacher initiates the talk by display questions to promote negotiated meaning. He uses clarification request in (1). The learner gives a good response in (2). The negotiation goes on when teacher gives feedback by repeating the word as a comprehension check. He scaffolds using negative evaluation technique, *Protein? Not fat?* It seems the teacher is in doubt that she answers correctly. She answers by repeating the answer to confirm. In this stage, the teacher gives opportunities for learners to talk. The advantage for negotiated meaning is the actual communication occurs. The learners are to share their background knowledge to others. The class can benefit from this interaction. In (6), he initiates using a display question to know the learner's reason to choose shrimp roll. The interesting one, she answers implicitly (7). However, the teacher gives feedback by okay (8). The teacher is expected to extend or spend more time to ask more questions to clarify the learner's response to promote negotiated meaning. He can ask what it means to the learner. The learner-initiated communication can occur more in this stage. In fact, IRF pattern is constructed by the teacher in this stage and teacher uses display questions to elicit responses from the learners.

Data 4

- 1 T: Appetizer? What is appetizer? Are you familiar with it?
- 2 L: Opening food.
- 3 T: The food for opening lunch or dinner. *Hidangan pembuka*. Usually

we eat like light meal, salad, shrimp rolls. The main course is a big meal like steak, noodle, and lobster.

4 T: How about desert? What is desert?

5 Ls: *Hidangan pencuci mulut.*

6 T: *Hidangan pencuci mulut.* That's right.

Teacher initiates the conversation by a display question in (2 and 5). He scaffolds by giving clues to give feedback to students. He elaborates the appetizer by giving the context to learners. He characterizes the food chosen to differentiate appetizer and main course. For the dessert, he uses translation technique in (6). There is a cultural constraint for Indonesian learners for we do not have the ritual of having appetizer, main course and closing when having meals.

Data 5

1 T: Now it's time to practice ordering the food in the restaurant. I've already prepared some menu. I think you are familiar with the food. I'd like to switch your partners to do the work. (T decides the members of the group). He distributes the menu.

2 L: (They work in a group to make a dialog). There is no interaction between T and learners. The learners discuss the menu. They are preparing the dialogs. Supposedly, they are to come to the front of the class to perform a dialog.)

In extract 5, the learners are expected to be able to make a dialog based on menu provided by the learners. They work in a group of four. The learners are still under the control of the teacher. They still have guided practice. Teacher elaborates the direction and the learners do not respond. It is the class culture. If they are not asked, they do not respond. However, if the teacher asks

questions, using both types of questions, display and referential ones, they will engage easily in the interaction. It is the evidence for IRF pattern. There is culture constrains. To solve it, teacher should create IRF pattern to elaborate the direction by asking questions and the learners respond. The feedback is given after.

Teacher uses initiative phase in the beginning of the stage to introduce a new lesson to learners. Display and referential questions are used to know learners' background knowledge about food. Learners respond to the teacher's questions and there is no feedback as correction. Ideally, teacher should give feedback to the learners' responses to appreciate their engagement in the learning process even though it is in pre-teaching stage.

In practice stage, teacher initiates the conversation by asking using display questions and referential questions and statement to elaborate the direction. Learners respond to teachers' questions but not for the statement. The learners are given the opportunities to talk in the form of answering the teacher's questions. The data reveal that the learners do not give any responses to teacher's elaboration on the material and direction. For this, teacher can construct IRF pattern to lead the communicative interaction.

The feedback phase occurs in the practice stage. Teacher uses negotiated meaning to confirm the learners' responses, clarify the request and to verify the learners' responses. The negotiated meaning occurs in the short sequence. The teacher should extend the sequence of the conversation to give the opportunities for learners to express their opinion and to talk. The learner-initiated occurs; however, it should be extended in terms of time to promote actual communication. Additionally, the

teacher scaffolds the feedback by repeating the learner's response. Supposedly, the teacher can vary the feedback techniques to give more learning opportunities and facilitate learner-initiated talk.

CONCLUSION

IRF is the pattern that occurs mostly in classroom interaction can be used to analyze the classroom interaction. In addition, IRF pattern can promote learning opportunities and create communicative and actual communication in the classroom. Teacher starts the conversation by using more referential questions instead of display questions. Teacher can use statement to give content feedback but not for giving direction for teacher cannot spoon feed the learners. He can create the IRF pattern for giving direction when it is a practice stage. Moreover, feedback is to promote negotiated meaning which is believed can give learning opportunities for learners. Other scaffolding techniques can be applied in order to benefit the class regarding the improvement. Even though IRF pattern is not new and comes from the 1970ies era, it can still be used in Indonesian classes for learners still depend on the teachers very much. They need teacher initiates the talk first by asking them questions and they will answer and feedback is provided. The initiated talk by learners is in response phase and feedback phase. However, in initiated phase in IRF pattern, teacher plays the important role.

The IRF pattern can facilitate the learner-initiated communication and can facilitate learning opportunities for them. The teacher is expected to vary the techniques of initiating and giving feedback. The teacher should promote negotiated meaning and use referential questions more than display ones to gear

communicative classroom interaction and genuine communication. Based on the data, the teacher is recommended not to use statement to elicit learners' response. It is to use questions. The reason is there is culture constraint that they do not want to talk is they are not asked. It seems they feel reluctant to cut the conversation which is considered impolite. They pretend to understand the teacher's explanation.

REFERENCES

- Bhatta, B., & Butterfield, J. (2016). *Reconsidering IRF Sequences: A Focus on Team-Teaching Classrooms*. In P. Clements, A. Crause, & H. Browns (Eds.), *Focus on the learner*. Tokyo: JALT.
- Christie, F. (2002). *Classroom Discourse Analysis: Functional Perspective*. London: Continuum.
- Cullen, R. (1998). Teacher talk and the classroom context. *ELT Journal*, 52, 179-187.
- Diaz, N. R. (2009). A Comparative study of native and non-native teachers' scaffolding techniques in SLA at an early age. *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, 17, 57-73.
- Hall, J. K. (2009). Interaction as method and result of language learning. *Language Teaching* 43(2), 202-215.
- Kumaravadevalu, B. (1999). Critical classroom discourse analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 453-84
- Li, J. (2018). L1 in the IRF cycle: a case study of Chinese EFL classroom.
- Llinares-Garcia, A. (2005). The effect of teacher feedback on EFL learners' functional production in classroom discourse. *Anglogermanica Online*.
<http://www.uv.es/anglogermanica/2005/linares.html>.

- Mackey, A. (2012). *Input, Interaction and Corrective Feedback in L2 Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rashidi, N., & Rafieerad, M. (2010). Analyzing pattern of classroom interaction in EFL classroom in Iran. *The Journal of ASIA TEFL*, 7(3), 93-120.
- Seedhouse, P. (2011). Conversation Analytic Research into Language Teaching and Learning, in Hinkel, E. (Ed.). *The Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Vol. II. USA: Routledge.
- Sinclair & Coulhard. (1975). *Toward the Analysis of Second Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walsh, S. (2006). *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. USA: Routledge.