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## **M. A. Thesis in TEFL**

**An Investigation Into Oral Interaction in Language  
classes: A Conversation Analytic Point of View**

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**In the name of God**



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## **An Investigation Into Oral Interaction in Language classes: A Conversation Analytic Point of View**

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the interaction between language teachers and students in English language institutes. This work is done in the context of Yasuj city. Learning another language, which is in most cases English, involves many variables. One of these variables is the linguistic behavior in English classes. By linguistic behavior we mean the oral interaction in English classes. Oral interaction can take place between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. As mentioned above, oral interaction has a determining role in English classrooms. According to Long (1996: 185), "(language) learning occurs in interaction, not as a result of it". This is especially important in EFL contexts, given that in this context opportunities for real interaction are severely limited.

Today after the emergence of new methods and theories in language teaching, the order of the interaction in language classes has been considered as one the most important factors in the language teaching process. This was highly approved by the emergence of communicative language teaching approach. Previous works investigating oral interactional process have been mostly done from the discourse analytic point of view. Assuming the importance of the role of interaction in language classes, this study aims to analyze the interaction process in Yasuj language institutes based on the Conversation Analysis method. Conversation Analysis is a field that focuses heavily on issues of meaning and context in interaction. It does so by linking both meaning and context to the idea of sequence (John Heritage, 1995). To this end twenty classes were chosen from Yasuj English institutes. These classes were audio-recorded and transcribed. Then they analyzed through Conversation Analysis. As result, it was found that the order of interaction in Yasuj institutes is not consistent with the principles of Conversation Analysis.

**Key words:** Interaction, conversation analysis.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CA = Conversation Analysis

SLA = Second language Acquisition

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Preliminaries**

No one can deny the necessity of being able to speak a foreign language in today's world. Even some people consider those who cannot speak another language as illiterate. It may well be so. Among other reasons, this is because in the era of globalization, everything from commerce to even every day social transactions is sometimes done beyond political and monolingual borders. In this situation, English has been accepted as the most popular lingua franca. This lends support to the need to include English in the whole world's educational systems. Learning another language, which is in most cases English, involves many variables. One of these variables is the linguistic behavior in English classes. By linguistic behavior we mean the oral interaction in these classes. Oral interaction can take place between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. As mentioned above, oral interaction has a determining role in English classrooms. According to Long (1996: 185), "(language) learning occurs in interaction, not as a result of it". This is especially important in EFL contexts, given that in this context opportunities for real interaction are severely limited.

During the long history of language teaching, various methods have been applied in language classes by language teachers. For some of them, developing the oral ability was a certain goal. In others, no attention has been paid to the development of oral ability. In the 1950s, the grammar translation method was developed whose aim was to enable students to read and appreciate literature. In this method there was no real interaction in the classroom. In fact, language was

not taught through interaction because it was believed that knowledge of grammatical forms and lexical items is language learners only need is all language learners need. In order to avoid misunderstandings in the second language, the first language was used in the classroom. Thus, there was no real interaction in the second language classes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Then in the 1960s, audio-lingual method was developed which tried to make students proficient in grammar (Larsen Freeman, 1998).

Although the theoreticians of this method emphasized communication and oral interaction in classroom, there was no real opportunity for students to interact freely in classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 62). All interaction was controlled by the teacher. Even though there was some emphasis on the development of oral ability, this emphasis did not go far enough to enable language learners to make use of language for the purpose of communication. In the period between the 1970s and the 1980s, there was a major paradigm shift in teaching language. The quest for non-grammar based methods led to several methods and approaches. Communicative language teaching was a shift in language teaching/learning field and made the classroom an environment for authentic communication for the purpose of teaching communicative competence. This was particularly influenced by Hyme's ideas. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.159), "Hyme's theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community." According to Hyme, when a person acquires communicative competence, (s) he acquires both knowledge and ability for language use. A wide range of exercise types and activities could be used in communicative language teaching, provided that such exercises enable learners to accomplish the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing and meaning negotiation. In these practices, "Classroom activities are often designed to focus on completing tasks that are mediated through language or involve negotiation of information and information sharing" (Richards & Rodgers, p. 162). Recent communicative approaches have suggested

that one goal of English language teaching should be to include genuine or natural rather than typical or traditional classroom communication.

Nunan (2003: 137), for example, examined five exemplary communicative language lessons, and found that when the patterns of interaction were examined more closely, they resembled traditional patterns of classroom interaction rather than genuine interaction. He summed up the result that there was a growing body of classroom-based research which supports the conclusion that there are comparatively few opportunities for genuine communicative language use in second language classrooms. Thus Nunan (2003: 137) concludes that ESL teachers continue to emphasize form over meaning and accuracy over communication.

Cognizant of this fact, our goal in this study is to determine if oral interaction in English language classes promotes students' oral development or not. The present study is conducted within the general framework of 'conversation analysis' abbreviated as (CA). CA aims to recognize conversational interactions that are "free to variables in the content, number of participants and length" (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

Influenced by ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel and Goffman), CA was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s generally by the sociologist Harvey Sacks and his close associates Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Today CA is an established method used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, speech-communication and psychology. It is particularly influential in interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and discursive psychology, and is a coherent discipline in its own right. The use of the term "conversation" to categorize this disciplinary movement is sometimes considered to be misleading. For instance, one of the principal adherents of CA, Schegloff, recently defined talk-in-interaction as CA's topic (1987). The distinctive CA contribution is to show how learning is constructed by the use of interactional resources and to explicate the progress of learning and socially distributed cognition or intersubjectivity. From a broader perspective, CA is able to explicate the reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction and hence how learning takes place through interaction (Bryman, 2001).

The model of application which is most consistent with the nature of CA is describing oral interaction in the classroom. It is the best parameter to rely on, to investigate how oral interaction should be in a language class. In the current study, an attempt is made to scrutinize the classroom interactions between language teachers and students, and between students themselves, to determine how they are conducted. In addition, the conformation of these interactions to the principles of CA will be investigated.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Language teachers devote a considerable portion of the class time to interaction with students. However, it seems that the majority of language learners fail to develop the oral ability expected of them. This could certainly be attributed to a multitude of factors which may have gone wrong. However, it is necessary to scrutinize the ways in which interaction takes place in language classes to see to what extent teaching practices in terms of oral interaction could be blamed. This is warranted because a significant amount of class time is spent on oral interaction. If it turns out to be the case that these oral interactions do not help accomplish the objectives formulated for them in the first place, teachers, and by the same token, students may safely choose to spend the class time on more productive activities.

## **1.3 Significance of the study**

This study can be useful for teachers, language learners, educational authorities and material developers. Interactions between students and teachers, if conducted in the right ways, could lead to the development of oral ability in students. The findings of this study could help students to be involved in interactional processes which lend themselves better to the objectives of oral development. Teachers can also benefit from the findings of this study. Teachers spend a lot of class time on interacting with students. They can understand the weaknesses of their teaching style and in the light of these findings they can remedy them. The findings could also be useful for material developers. They can rely on the findings to decide

which materials can be best for students. The findings can also be useful for the educational authorities. They can base their educational policies on the findings of this study and similar studies in order to make improvements in the practices of language education.

## **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the present study are twofold. The first objective is to scrutinize oral interactions which take place between teachers and students and between students themselves in language classes in order to gain insights into the ways in which these interactions are conducted. The second objective is to determine to what extent such practices are consistent with the principles of conversation analysis, if at all. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the ways in which classroom interactions between teachers and learners and between students themselves take place in language classes?
2. Do interactional patterns in language classes conform to the principles of conversation analysis?

## **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

The key terms of the study are as follows: conversation analysis and oral interaction, which are defined below:

### **1.5.1 Conversation Analysis**

Conversation Analysis is a field that focuses heavily on issues of meaning and context in interaction. It does so by linking both meaning and context to the idea of sequence. In fact, conversation analysis embodies a theory which argues that sequences of actions are a major part of what we mean by context, that the meaning of an action is heavily shaped by the sequence of previous actions from which it emerges, and that social action is dynamically creating things that are expressed in and through the sequential organization of action (Heritage, 1995).

### **1.5.2 Oral Interaction**

Interaction is conceived of as an opportunity to process linguistic input and output and to engage in negotiation of meaning. Because negotiation of meaning is thought to lead to language acquisition, researchers investigate which types of pedagogic tasks lead to a greater level of negotiation of meaning in the classroom (Robinson, 2001; Van den Branden, 1997).

## **1.6 Theoretical framework of the study**

In order to conduct the study, a theoretical framework is needed. This study uses Tsui's (1994) framework as the theoretical framework. According to Tsui herself, the framework offered by her is by no means innovative, but proposes attributes of several observational schemes, proposed by Barnes et al. (1969) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), which will help in analyzing the following aspects:

1. The verbal interaction pattern.
2. The language input provided by the teacher and how it affects the immediate output of the pupils.
3. Modified input and interaction, and how effective they are as a means of providing comprehensive input and enhancing interaction.

She asserts that the basic organizational unit of conversation is a three-part exchange including initiation, response and follow-up (Tsui, 1994). The framework is presented below:

**Table 1.1: An Intuitive Taxonomy of Discourse Acts occurring in Teacher-Student Talk**

Subclasses	Subcategories	-
Requestives	a) Request for action	-
-	b) Request for permission	-
-	c) Offer	-
-	d) Invitation	-
-	e) Proposal	-
Directives	a) Advices	1. Advice
-	-	2. Warning
-	b) Mandatives	1. Instruction
-	-	2. Threat
-	c) Nominate	-
Elicitations	a) Elicit: inform	1. Factual Q
-	-	2. Yes/no Q
-	-	3. Reasoning Q
-	-	4. Explanation Q
-	-	5. Opinion Q
-	-	6. Inform Q
-	-	7. Resting ElicitQ
-	b) Elicit: Confirm	-
-	c) Elicit: Agree	-
-	d)Elicit: Repeat	-
-	e)Elicit: Clarify	-
-	f)Elicit: Commit	-
Informatives	a) Report	-
-	b) Expressive	-
-	c) Assessments	1. Assessing
-	-	2. Compliment
-	-	3. Criticism
-	-	4. Self-denigration
-	-	5. Self-commendation
-	d) Clue	-
Responding Acts	a) Positive response	-
-	b) Negative response	-
-	c) Temporization	-
Follow-up acts	a) Endorsement	1. Positive/ Encouraging evaluation
-	-	2. Negative evaluation
-	-	3. Comment
-	b) Concession	-
-	c) Acknowledgment	1. Accept
-	-	2. Repair
-	-	3. Accept with repair
Second follow-up move	Turn-passing	-

(Tsui, 1994:256). It should be stated that, the patterns repair and accept with repair are added to the original framework.



## **1.7. Outline of the Study**

This thesis is composed of five chapters. The second chapter is review of literature. In this chapter literature about conversation analysis will be briefly reviewed. In addition, the studies which have been conducted into classroom interaction will be touched upon. The third chapter is devoted to the methodology used in the study. In this chapter sampling, participants in the study and their characteristics, data collection and data analysis of the study will be described. The fourth chapter reports on the results of the study, followed by discussion. In this chapter the results of the study will be presented and compared with findings of similar studies. And the last chapter is devoted to summary, conclusions and implications. In this chapter, first the findings of the study will be summarized. Then, the conclusions of the study will be discussed. This will be followed by the implications of the findings of the study and the limitations.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Since Audiolingualism entered the scene of language education, and even more so, since the advent of communicative language teaching approach, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the authenticity of classroom activities. If language education is to inculcate oral ability in language learners, then it follows that classroom interaction must have some semblance to real-life situations. Given that in the current study, classroom interaction is to be viewed from the standpoint of conversation analysis, this chapter will be devoted to the characterization of conversation analysis, the relevance of conversation analysis to language teaching and the studies carried out into the nature of classroom interaction.

Specifically, by considering the role of oral interaction in EFL classrooms, and also by considering the principles of CA, this chapter is composed of three sections. In the first section, the tenets of CA will be discussed in general. In the second section, interaction in EFL classrooms will be discussed in some detail and the findings of studies into classroom interaction will be reported. And in the third section, the studies into CA from the viewpoint of teaching will be touched upon.

#### **2.2 A General Characterization of Conversation Analysis**

In the 1960s, a new branch of study developed which was called ‘conversation analysis’. This new branch was the result of the close cooperation between Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Scghegloff and Gail Jefferson. In fact in the 1960s, a

cognitive revolution emerged that highly affected social sciences. Attitude to participants' role in social patterns was the main subject claimed by this revolution. Conversation analysis, abbreviated as (CA), was originally derived from this revolution. In fact the main goal of CA is to investigate underlying social rules and patterns by studying talk between people. To analyze these underlying layers of society, we should have enough information about action, common knowledge and social patterns. Therefore, it is possible to say that in CA social interaction is considered as a powerful connector between individual person and social patterns and also between culture and social reciprocator.

CA is a general approach to analyzing talk and interaction, and was first developed for studying ordinary conversation. But now it can be applied in a wide area ranging from courtrooms and news interview conducts to political speeches. According to Goffman (1974:46), CA can be defined in two ways. In one way it can be defined as casual talk in everyday settings; and in another way it can be defined as an equivalent of talk or spoken encounter. By using the second definition, structural patterns of casual conversation have been investigated by a line of research. This line of research has established characteristics that systematically differentiated CA from other types of studies of talk.

CA is in fact a useful tool for the act of deduction which makes producing and recognizing comprehensible layers of talk possible. According to Goodwin (1981:47), "There is a theory of context that links processes of interpretive talk in a reflective time bounded process." It can be said that this theory is at the center of the mentioned objectives. If we compare CA with some other methods that try to analyze isolated sentences and utterances, CA claims that in the interaction of the real world sentences are not isolated and abstract. Therefore, CA involves analyzing sentences in a real world context. According to Goffman (1974:159), "In CA sentences (the abstract entities that are the objects of linguistic enquiry) and utterances (the stream of speech actually produced by a speaker in conversation) are understood as forms of action situated within specific contexts and designed with specific attention to these contexts".

The starting point for participants in a conversation and also for the professional analysts in analyzing any utterance is the talk or any other kind of action that it is involved in.

The concept of interactional sequence was the issue which caused the opening of a new way for a huge number of empirical researches. This issue is based on the notion that "each current conversational action includes a here and now definition of the circumstance to which subsequent talk will be attributed" (Heritage, 1984:38). For example a primary notion of this was developed by Sacks et al. (1974:140), under the topic of adjacency pair. The central characteristic of adjacency pairs is the rule that a current action (a first pair part such as a greeting or a question) needs producing a reciprocal action (or second pair part) at the first possible occasion after the first action. The range of this concept can be displayed by a multiple of situations in which a next action appropriate to the first one occurs and also by the situations in which it does not occur. In these situations, for example, when a second participant does not return a greeting, the appropriate next action is regarded as noticeably absent and this absence "can become an object for remedial efforts and justifiable negative deductions "(Sacks & Schegloff, 1979:153). It is by means of these second actions that speakers can influence or limit their co-participants' conceptions. Therefore, the concept of adjacency-pair is not a description of statistical regularities in interaction. Instead, according to Sacks & Schegloff, 1979:155, it is "a description of procedures in which participants limit one another, and keep one another accountable to produce coherent and intelligible actions."

Assuming that conceptualization of action is both shaped and renewed by context; we have a number of consequences. First, it rejects the point of view that considers context as a static field which is surrounded by sentences, speech events or other kinds of actions. Second, as far as the sense and the relevance are taken from and then are contributed to the interpreted field, which is created by the events that occur before that action, analysis should cover more than the isolated sentence. In fact, analysis should also involve the sequences within which individual actions occur and where they are joined to each other (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). This approach to analyzing interactional and conversational data