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# The Relationship between EFL Learners' Behavioral Patterns in Learner/Teacher Centered Classes and the Proficiency Level of the Learners

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was carried on to investigate the relationship between EFL learners' behavioral patterns in learner/ teacher-centered classes and the proficiency level of the learners. It is believed that as one moves up from one level of proficiency to another, classroom interaction becomes less teacher-centered and learners have a bigger share in classroom discourse. The participants of the present study were 180 female students of nine EFL classes majoring in 'Interchange 1', 'Interchange 3', and 'Passages 2' books at Sadr English language institute. In each of the classes under study, a total of sixty minutes of classroom interaction was tape-recorded, thirty minutes of which was randomly chosen for the sake of the present study. The tape-recorded data were later analyzed based on Brown's Interaction Analysis System (BIAS). A post hoc sheffe test was conducted to shed light on the differences. It was revealed that learners showed the most responding behavior at the advanced-level classes, and they showed less responding behavior at the intermediate classes, and they showed still less responding behavior at the elementary level classes. The results also showed that teachers had the most frequency of talking at the elementary level classes, and they had the least frequency of talking at the advanced level classes. Teacher talk at the intermediate classes was in between.

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## Introduction

Interpersonal interaction and the survey of the behavioral patterns are thought of as a fundamental requirement of foreign language acquisition (hereinafter FLA). Many researchers have stated that language instruction requires the development of interactional competence, and interaction is a fundamental element of language teaching for communication (Rivers, 1987; Ellis, 1988). The interactionist perspectives in FLA have considerably emphasized the role of interaction in general, and meaning negotiation and behavioral patterns in particular, with respect to the conditions which are theoretically important for FLA.

It is very important that teachers construct an interactive learning environment in which learners can communicate with each other in the target language and negotiate meaning by means of interaction. The more learners participate orally, and the more they engage in the negotiation of meaning, the better they will acquire the language. Research studies have shown that this kind of learning may result in (a) higher student's achievements and greater productivity, (b) more caring, supportive and committed relationship among students, and (c) greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem. In order for any classroom to be a fruitful experience, there should be some sort of interaction between students and the teacher so that they can exchange opinions and produce knowledge. Sinclair and Brazil (1982) have identified three aspects of teaching in traditional classrooms, i.e., the subject matter of lessons, the organization of lessons and the disciplinary element, in all of which teachers are involved in 'telling things to pupils', 'getting pupils to do things' and 'evaluating the things that pupils do'. Sinclair and Brazil believe that foreign language classrooms differ little from traditional classrooms where the teacher takes the controlling role and conducts a fairly ritual conversation with students. The learners

behave mainly as one many headed participant, avoiding cross conversation and acknowledging dominance of the teacher in their verbal behavior.

Classroom interaction is a controversial issue, and it usually depends on the socio-linguistic relationships between the teacher and the students. The students' level of proficiency is one of the sociolinguistic factors which is the subject of the present study. This study investigates the responding behavior and interaction of EFL learners; in other words, this study tries to find out if learners with different proficiency levels show more responding behavior and interaction than teachers in the EFL classes.

## Review of literature

Interaction refers to the facility in using a language when the attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages. (Rivers, 1987) Teachers make adjustments to both language form and language function in order to help communication in the classroom. Learner-centered and teacher-centered interactions are natural processes that occur in the classroom and the frequency of their occurrence depends on certain factors. One of the important factors affecting the nature of class interaction might be the students' level of proficiency.

Observation of many different classes both in content area subjects and in language instruction consistently show that teachers typically do between one half and three quarters of the talking in the classroom. This finding is partially explained by Bellack, Herbet, Kliebard and Smith's (1966) observation of four classroom discourse moves. His observation has revealed that structuring, soliciting and reacting are usually restricted to the teacher, and only responding behavior is typically restricted to the students.

Behavioral patterns are initiating behaviors, responding behaviors and silence behavior that occur in the classes. It is important to know what happens inside classrooms. Descriptive frameworks in the Interaction Analysis tradition aim to analyze

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classroom interaction in order to find out something about the sort of teaching and learning going on. To this aim, some evaluation systems were provided. (Amidon and Flanders, 1967; Flanders, 1970; Newman, 2004) Brown's Interaction Analysis System (BIAS) (1975) is one of these systems which is as follows:

The behaviors consist of different subcategories that are described in the above-mentioned table. This system is a simplification and a reduction of Flanders' (1970) original ten categories. This system consists of seven categories of verbal behavior. The first three categories are connected to the teacher talk and the next two categories are related to the student talk.

To evaluate a class regarding the interaction of the teacher and the students, we need to observe the class and use a system to record the events. Nunan (1987) stated that interaction analysis involves the use of analytical observation schemes, and it focuses on the social meanings inherent in classroom interaction.

Yousefi and Koosha (2013) employed Brown's system, and they investigated the degree of teacher- vs. student- centered classroom interaction in the MA courses of three different fields of TEFL, General Linguistic, and Translation Studies at Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan, Isfahan. They used different types of analysis. They employed an analysis of variance, the Chi-square test, and also an independent-samples t-test to check whether the obtained differences were meaningful. Post hoc Scheffe test was also conducted to see the exact differences. A researcher-made questionnaire was also used to study the reactions of the students. The findings showed that although the investigated fields varied from each other regarding of learner/teacher interactions, the differences, except in the case of Responding Behavior, were not statistically significant.

Allwright (1980), using audio taped data from two parallel UCLA low-level ESL classes, concluded that the teacher has a vastly disproportionate number of turns compared with other participants and that most of them have the function of "discourse maintenance", that is, taking an unsolicited turn, when a turn is available. He adds that the teacher also does almost all the interrupting and is even among those guilty of turn stealing. This phenomenon might be partly explained by teachers' intolerance of silence.

Richard and Lockhart (1994) pointed out that in many classrooms, students have few opportunities to ask and answer the questions; teacher may address their questions to only a few students in the class that are laying within their action zone [students whom the teachers make eye contact, address questions, and nominate during the class].

According to Johnson (1995), despite the fact that student / student interaction allows students to interact with one another teacher still maintain a certain amount of control over the structure and some times , even the content of student – student interaction.

### **This study**

#### **Participants, instruments and procedure**

The present study tried to investigate the types of interaction between teachers and students. Moreover, it studies the potential difference between the proficiency level of the students and their types of interaction.

The participants of this study, 180 female students of nine EFL classes, were selected from among 270 students majoring in Interchange 1, Inter change 3 and passages 2 books at Sadr English language institute. Three classes at the elementary level, three classes at the intermediate level, and three classes at the advanced level were selected through administering an Oxford

Placement Test (OPT) as a screening test. This screening was absolutely necessary because the participants had to be homogeneous in order to take part in the subsequent tests.

In this study, Brown's interaction analysis system (BIAS) will be used to analyze the data in terms of the quality and quantity of interactions. In order to implement the BIAS system, a tally sheet is used and marked every three seconds for the duration of the observation.

A total of nine classes of Sadr institute were chosen for the sake of the present study. In each of these classes a total of two teaching sessions were tape-recorded. During each session, lasting ninety minutes, sixty minutes of classroom interaction was tape-recorded. Because of the volume of the study and the impracticality of handling the data, just thirty minutes out of sixty minutes was randomly chosen to comprise the data for the present study. The timings used for taped-recording of the classroom interaction were approximately the same.

It must be mentioned that the researchers asked for permission before observing and recording each class, in order to make sure that they did not mind about the presence of the observers. The percentage of time being spent in each category of BIAS was calculated. Percentages of teacher talk (categories 1 – 3), student talk (categories 3 & 5) and silence (category 6) as well as unclassifiable (category 7) were calculated.

The frequency, the proportion, and the mean score of teacher talk vs. student talk were calculated at different levels of proficiency. A univariate analysis of variance was run to see whether these differences were meaningful or not. A post hoc sheffe test was run in order to spot the difference, and to provide the researcher with more detailed information about those differences.

### **The results of the study**

We can claim that success or failure in English language learning typically depends on the quality and quantities of interactions and behavioral patterns that take place during English language classrooms. It seems essential, therefore, for us to explore the relationship between the EFL learners' behavioral patterns and their English language development. The present research was an attempt to determine the relationship between EFL learners' behavioral patterns in teacher / learner centered classes and the proficiency level of the learners. According to descriptive statistics of teacher responding (TR) in table 4.1, there are differences in TR among the three levels of proficiency.

Teachers showed the most responding behavior at the advanced level and the least at the elementary classes. Their responding behavior at the intermediate classes was in between. To test whether the difference is meaningful or not, a Univariate Analysis of Variance was conducted. (See table 4.2) It was found that though there are differences among the levels with regard to the variable in question, this difference is not meaningful at 5% level of significance.

A posthoc sheffe test was used to show the difference. This is shown in table 4.3 and 4.4.

This test revealed that at 5% level of significance one can say that there is a difference, but since the difference is not significant , it is not possible to say which levels differ most from each other and which levels differ least from each other. To better understand the result, a bar graph is provided. It was found that learners showed the most responding behavior at the advanced levels, less at the intermediate levels, and the least at the elementary levels. The descriptive statistics shown in table 4.5 demonstrate the point.

**Table 2.1 Brown's Interaction Analysis System (BIAS)**

Teacher Talk	Initiation	TL	Teacher lectures, describes, explains, narrates, directs e.g., this is Brown's procedure for coding classroom interaction.
		TQ	Teacher questions, about content or procedure, which pupils are intended to answer.
	Response	TA	Teacher responds, accepts feelings of the class; describes past and future feelings in a non threatening way; praises, encourages, jokes with pupils; accepts or uses pupils ideas I builds upon pupils, responses; uses mild criticism such as no not quite.
Student Talk	Response	PA	Pupils respond directly and predictably to teacher questions and directions.
	Initiation	PV	Pupils volunteer information, comments, or questions.
		S	Silence, Pauses, short periods of silence.
		X	Unclassifiable. Confusion in which communications cannot be understood; in usual activities such as reprimanding or criticizing pupils; demonstrating without accompanying teacher or pupils talk; short spates of black board work without accompanying teacher or pupil talk.

**Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics: Dependent variable: TR**

Level of studies	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Elementary	22.1667	16.15446	6
Intermediate	50.0000	50.98627	6
Advanced	59.5000	23.65375	6
Total	43.8889	35.65998	18

**Table 4.2 Tests of between – subjects effects: Dependent variable: TR**

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Corrected model	4517.444(a)	2	2258.722	1.981	.172
Intercept	34672.222	1	3472.222	30.414	.000
Level	4517.444	2	2258.722	1.981	.172
Error	17100.333	15	1140.022		
Total	56290.000	18			
Corrected total	21617.778	17			

**Table 4.3 Multiple comparisons: Dependent variable: TR**

(I) level of studies	(J) level of studies	Mean difference (I – J)	Std . Error	Sig	95% confidence interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper bound
Elementary	Intermediate	-27.8333	19.49378	.385	-80.7353	25.0686
	Advanced	-37.3333	19.49378	.194	-90.2353	15.5686
Intermediate	Elementary	27.8333	19.49378	.385	-25.0686	80.7353
	Advanced	-9.5000	19.49378	.889	-62.4020	43.4020
Advanced	Elementary	37.3333	19.49378	.194	-15.5686	90.2353
	Intermediate	9.5000	19.49378	.889	-43.4020	62.4020

**Table 4.4 Homogeneous subsets: TR**

Level of studies	N	Subset (1)
1	6	22.1667
2	6	50.0000
3	6	59.5000
Sig		194

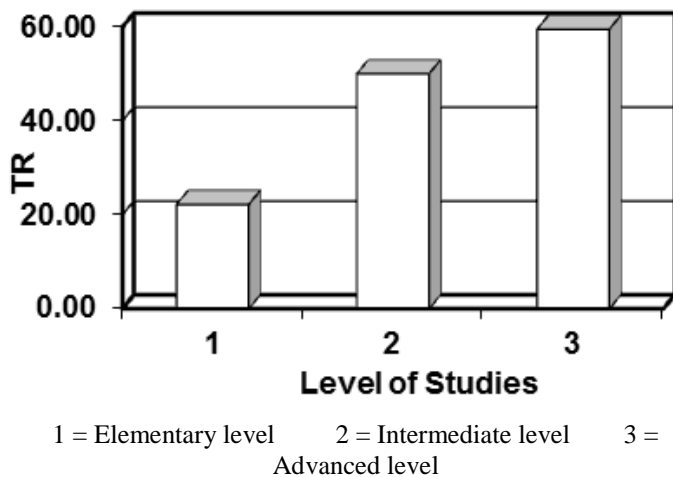


Figure 4.1 Bar graphs for TR

### Conclusion & discussion

Behavioral patterns studies have shown however, that in traditional classrooms, teachers do most of the talking with percentages of interaction time devoted to teacher talk ranging from 50% to 82.2% and the average ranging from 68% to 72% (Bellack et. al, 1996; flanders, 1970).

It seems that EFL classes in Iran are still teacher – centered and teachers through lecturing which is a kind of behavioral patterns, dominate the classroom discourse, and students as a one many- headed participant share a little portion of the classroom discourse.

In the present study an attempt was made to determine the relationship between EFL learners' behavioural patterns in learner / teacher – centered classrooms and the proficiency level of the learners to see if the degree of EFL learners' behavioural patterns in teacher / learner – centered classes is affected by the proficiency level of the learners.

The investigation revealed that learners showed the most responding behavior at the advanced – level classes. At the intermediate level classes, they showed less responding behavior, and at the elementary level classes, they showed still less responding behavior. However, since the means were dose to each other, the difference was not significant at 5% level of significance.

The difference in mean of the responding behavior, tends to support Seliger (1983) who claimed that the more proficient learners have a bigger share of class discourse than less proficient ones. In all of the three levels teachers showed more responding behavior than the learners and this is in opposition with Bellack et al. (1966), and Dunkin and Biddle (1974) study in which the learners uttered the most of the responding moves. This provides support for a number of studies like Musemeci (1996), Flanders (1970), Coulthard (1985), Tsui (1995), Bellack et al. (1966), Dunkin and Biddle (1974), and Legarreta's (1997) study in which teachers dominated the classroom discourse and students had a little portion of it.

As a concluding note , it can be stated that although it was revealed that elementary classes were more teacher–centered than the intermediate classes , and the intermediate classes in their own turns were more teacher–centered than the advanced classes , any generalization based on the results of the present study should be made cautiously.

The results of this study may be of benefit to EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and syllabus designers, as well as to the

learners. The findings may encourage teachers who still believe in teacher centeredness in language to change their viewpoints in favor of more learner – centered approaches. The findings may also encourage teachers to focus on class interactions which are in accordance with the students' level of proficiency. The results are especially of value to teachers in Iran in that they become aware of what actually goes on in the classrooms, so that they may not interrupt the current of the natural interactions that occur in the classrooms.

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