New interaction patterns in language classrooms

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Abstract: IRF sequences have been examined profusely before and were reported to be negatively correlated with participation opportunities (Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 1986; Ellis, 1994). In all these studies, IRFs have been considered as a static and inflexible interaction patterns. Based on video- taped data from ten English classes, which were analyzed within conversation analysis framework, this study uncovers a modified version of IRFs labeled as ISRF sequences. ISRFs have been shown here to destroy even those very limited learning opportunities which IRFs could offer. The finding implies that teachers must totally exclude ISRFs sequences from their practice.

1. Introduction

Within the framework of Vygotskian psychology learning is conceived as participation in the act of learning than acquisition (Donato, 2000). This governing metaphor of learning as participation explicitly signifies the fact that the quality of learning can be gauged through the analysis of the participation quality of students. On the grounds that teacher and students' participation in classroom events is largely realized through interaction, the investigation of the classroom interaction is regarded as the principal approach through which participation can be investigated. Further, the interaction between teacher-students within classrooms is largely unfolded through IRF sequences.

The most frequently occurring interaction system within the classroom discourse is IRF sequences which is the most investigated speech exchange system as well. Nonetheless, it is important to note as quoted by Waring (2009, p.797) that "IRF is not the only interaction that takes place in the classroom; neither is it a single sequence type". IRFs are three parts structures, which start by initiation of a question by teacher (I), followed by a student response (R), and evaluated by the teacher feedback (F). Thinking of IRF cycles as the most frequently occurring interaction system within classroom, it becomes crystal clear that teacher's talk takes up the most proportion of the classroom interaction, since, in each sequence teacher has privilege to contribute twice to the ongoing network of interaction in the classroom. The first contribution of the teacher is manifested in *Initiation* move of the IRF sequence when he, in fact, opens up the sequence. The second contribution is realized via his *feedback* or *assessment* move. Therefore, the impact of IRF cycles on the creation or suppression of learning opportunities could be thought of as originating from two different constructs within IRF sequences.

A moderate proportion of these impacts, it could be argued that, result from initiation move of the teacher in IRF sequences. When the teacher is launching a sequence, the type, the nature, and the function of initiation move determine the amount of student's engagement in mental reasoning, involvement in social practice, and available space for them to maneuver on the teacher initiation. It is notable to acknowledge that the concept of initiation is not solely limited to teacher questions. The remaining source of these impacts is the teacher's third move in IRF sequences. It is believed that the type, nature, and the function of F move impact the forthcoming learning opportunities to a large extent, an assertion which is confirmed by so many scholars (Nassaji and Wells, 2000; Waring 2008, 2009). It is notable to claim that the effect of third move is believed to be much stronger than that of initiation move. Underlying intricacies of the feedback move of IRF cycles have been revealed before. Nassaji and Wells (2000), while investigating form and function of feedback move of IRF cycles, uncovered some occupants of the third move of IRFs. These options were asking for clarification, explanation, alternative opinions, comments or meta-comments (p. 15).

IRF sequences, though were the most frequent interaction pattern in any type of classroom, were criticized harshly owing to their anti-pedagogical nature (Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 1986; Ellis, 1994).). Many of these researchers claimed that in classes in which the activities were based on strict use of IRF sequences, the teacher took up the large portion of talking and giving opinion letting only bordered space for students to come up with their very limited replies. Having examined the data from her own and some other classrooms, Cazden (1988) revealed that the

teacher's use of this speech pattern more often facilitated his control of the interaction rather than the students learning of the content of the lesson.

Similarly, Barnes (1992) studied the interaction between the teacher and the students in several classrooms which lead him to conclude that extensive use of IRF sequences in the class did not allow for the complex ways of communication. He (1969) was also too much surprised to see how IRF sequences evoked the teacher to talk abundantly while a very short time was left for pupils' answers and most importantly he was amazed by the pupils' passivity and absence of their engagement in the issues being presented to them. More recently, he noted that IRF sequences performs the function of managing the class and holding student's attention but it does not easily give opportunities for pupils to work on understanding through talk (2008, p.10).

Moreover, Gutierrez (1994) in her study of journal sharing in language arts classroom argued that recitation scripts (IRF sequences) resulted in the creation of static and extremely structured contexts for learning. In addition, the strictness and highly controlled nature of this type of discourse provided limited opportunities for students to produce elaborated talk, especially about topics or subtopics they generated. More importantly, she claimed that the directionality of talk floods from teacher to individual student and back to teacher, therefore, creates the least possible opportunity for students to respond to one another's utterances. Through the analysis of the patterns of interaction across those classrooms, she also showed that recitation scripts ruined the students' chances for interacting with and receiving assistance from peers and for participating in the very discourse they were ultimately expected to produce.

The most significant finding of these researchers was their strong conviction in the ineffectiveness of use of IRF cycles and its irrelevance to institutional setting. Indeed, a strong case could be made that the very underlying objective of classroom instruction abandons the idea of use of IRF sequences in language classes. Limited IRF cycles of classroom speech exchange system falls foul of preparing students to attain communicative skill to use in the target society which possess a severely complex nature of communication system.

2. Material and Methods

The primary source of data for the present study was ten two-hour adult English as a foreign language classes in a private language school in Ankara which the researcher recorded in the summer of 2011. These classes ranged in level from beginner to intermediate and advanced. The data was actually collected by four

different procedures within those classes. These resources were video-tapes, audio-recordings, transcriptions, and field notes. The video-tapes of the class were captured from the very moment the teacher entered the class to the moment the class was over. During the class the researcher also prepared field notes concerning the some special events of the class room.

The audio-recorded and video-taped data were transcribed attentively line-by-line based on a simplified version of Jefferson's model developed by Ten Have (2007). The final analysis was conducted based on the transcripts. Though, in different stages of the analysis, video-tapes, audio recordings, and sometimes field notes were resorted to arrive at better understanding.

The analysis phase of this study was conducted within conversation analysis framework. Conversation analysis is a tool for analyzing sequential development of classroom interaction generally for the purpose of carrying out micro-analysis of classroom discourse. It is noteworthy to make mention that CA has potential to investigate talk-in-interaction meticulously and present a detailed account of how different components of talk-in-interaction create or inhibit learning opportunities in instructional practices. Therefore, using CA framework we tried to investigate this question: Do IRF sequences have a fixed structure? If they undergo any modification in their internal structure, how does such change have potential to suppress learning opportunities? The final data for this study were extracted from teacher C's class.

3. Results

The Not unlike a common feature of IRF sequences (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), in ISRF sequences, an initiation move addressing a specific student is projected by teacher. Most of these initiations are personal questions (Wells and Nassaji, 2000, p.388). In the case of IRF sequences, in the second moves, students are provided with a turn to come up with their answers. Whereas in ISRF because of the abrupt projection of subsequent move, students have only short time to struggle and show only their readiness to answer using a physical gesture. Immediately following second turn, third turn of ISRF sequence is projected by the teacher himself and surprisingly it contains a complete answer to his own projected initiation at the beginning of the sequence. The answer is so complete both in terms of its communicative function and linguistic accuracy and also in terms of its discoursal relevance that no need is felt by student to introduce his/her own response. In the third turn of ISRF sequences it could be claimed that teacher is actually insincerely robbing a student's

participation opportunity and appropriates the chance for himself. The nature of the forth move of ISRF sequence is again surprising in terms of both its content and origin. As a key feature of IRF sequences, a specific type of feedback or any other type of follow-ups (Wells and Nassaji, 2000, p.379) were provided by the teacher to indicate to the students, the quality of their responses or to show whether they needed to add some new aspects to their answer or produce it differently. Similarly in ISRF sequences a feedback is provided to ensure the appropriateness of the answer given in previous turn. Nonetheless, this time, as it may seem surprising, the feedback move is projected by student. In all the cases of ISRF sequences which were investigated for this research, unexceptionally all the feedback moves of the students were limited to a single word TCUs, as it is noticeable in the excerpt A (line 293). ISRF sequence can be either a single sequence consisting of a teacher initiation, student struggle, teacher response, and student feedback, as is the case with excerpt A or they can start a nuclear exchange"(Wells and Nassaji, 2000, p.379) or what Mehan calls as "topically related sets"(1979, 65) which entails the projection of a number of dependent exchanges as is the case with excerpt B. Below examples excerpts of each kind will be provided and their anti-pedagogical value will be examined.

1.1.1.1. Single ISRF sequences

Excerpt A is an example of a single ISRF sequence which is taken from Teacher C's Elementary class where she is going to review the previous lesson and elicits some information about Mattie Smith. The grammatical focus of the lesson under question is past tense of verbs after several elicitations concerning Mattie Smith's past life, topic of discussion changes to personal questions about teacher. She provides students with some personal questions about herself in Turkish, and entices students to render the given question into English, (line 249) of the excerpt A. Her last question which later turns out to launch an example of ISRF sequences, is actually addressing all the student of the class. In line 249 Teacher D asks the class to translate a question into English and ask her. (i.e. ne zeman bashladin ishlemega? *[when did you start to work?]).* All the class interestedly gets engaged in the ongoing process of producing the given question correctly. All the students have opportunities to come up with their answers and try to test their hypotheses (lines 249- 272).

Excerpt A a single ISRF sequence (Taken from Teacher C's class)

0249   (Teacher C):   ((asks in Turkish))Soal sorushun manan, mana deyin   ne   zeman bashladin ishlemega?

(Ask me a question; ask me, when did you start to work?)

0250   (1.59)
0251   LL: [when] do (.) you started when do you started
0252   (Teacher C):   whe:::n <di::d you=
0253   LL: =[when did you started your work?/ your job?]=
0254   (Teacher C):   = sorushun zama::ne Gozashte *(ask in past tense)*, (.) a::sk me question in past form (.) past simple (.)   te::nse↑((she is wiping out the whiteboard)
0255   (2.43)
0256   (Teacher C):   ne zeman bashladin ishlemega?
(when did you started your work)
0257   LL: when/when]
0258   (Teacher C):   whe:::n↑
0259   LL: when/when did you
0260   (Teacher C):   <di:::d↑
0261   LL: did you::
0262   (Teacher C):   <you
0263   LL: started/started/start?
0264   (Teacher C):   you::? =
0265   LL: started/started/
0266   (Teacher C):   (.) start or started?
0267   LL: start/started/
0268   (Teacher C):   sta::::rt↑
0269   LL: start/start to work/work
0270   (Teacher C):   to:::↑?
0271   LL: to work/work
0272   (Teacher C):   to:: < work (.) o:: k <answer>

0273	(Mohamad):	I started to work when I=
0274	(Teacher C):	=aha
0275	(Mohamad):	= when I was
0276	(Teacher C):	I:::↑?
0277	(Mohamad):	= twenty
0278	(Ali):	I started to work
0279	(Teacher C):	started
0280	(Ali):	to work when I was=
0281	(Teacher C):	to:: work?
0282	L:	when you was
0283	(Ali):	when I was (.)
0284	(Teacher C):	I wa::s < I was↑>
0285	(Ali):	ten
0286	(Teacher C):	ten you were kid?
0287	L:	بیســـت
0288	(Teacher C):	twenty
0289	(Reza):	= or I never start to work
0290	(Teacher C):	you never started to work? (.) why::?=
0291	(Reza):	((struggling to answer)) - =
0292	(Teacher C):	= because you are a co:::llege student↑?
0293	(Reza):	=yes=
	(Teacher C):	= < ok> very good

Finally, through their collaboration and with joint help of their teacher, students could arrive at the correct form of the question. Subsequently, teacher demands the students to answer the question. Mohamad who is one of the most active students of the class, easily takes the talking floor. His classmates join him and help him to produce an accurate and appropriate answer which is then successfully accomplished through intimate cooperation of the teacher. Reza who is a less active student, compared to his classmates, seems to be less satisfied with his passivity in class discussion. Therefore, he ventures to take the floor and produce an alternative answer to the given question (line 289). His reply is pleasantly a personal and self directed response to the question at hand. (or I never start to work) Showing a sincere interest in Reza's personal answer and the fact that he actually tried to participate, teacher C repeats his question in high pitch to appreciate his contribution. After teacher's repetition, interaction pattern changes and ISRF sequence unfolds. Following her repetition of Reza's question in line 290, she asks a referential question which shows her full understating of the significance of the opportunity under question. In the last turn-constructional units (TCU) (Sacks, Schegloff, et al. 1974, pp.702-704) of line 290, she initiates a new sequence "why?" and expects him to come up with an appropriate answer. Teacher C's "why" is actually is the first move of ISRF sequence. As a result of teacher's initiation move, Reza is struggling to provide a give up a response in his second move. Through his physical gesture, he shows that he is, in fact, undertaking the process of meaning making and is trying to come up with answer. Quickly following Reza's second turn, teacher's third turn move unfolds which contains an appropriate answer to her own "why" in the initiation move. The answer in line 292 is a clue to the fact that teacher C has a good amount of information about Reza. When she gives the answer in line 292 (i.e. because you are a co:::llege student↑?) the smile on her face and her declarative tone of the statement shows that she is quite certain about the accuracy of the response. Finally as a matter of fact, Reza inevitably orients to teacher's modification to interaction network and readily adopts the role of providing the teacher with feedback in the forth move of ISRF sequences. Therefore, he comes up with answer "yes"(line 293) to certify the accuracy of teacher's response. Though, his dissatisfaction for the lost participation opportunity was like a visible color in his face. There are also some other unintelligible utterances in Turkish by another student which seemed to be addressing this issue that a change in interaction pattern happened. Though, neither video- tapes nor audio-records could do any help to their meticulous micro-analysis.

4. Discussions

We previously discussed that IRF sequences were negatively correlated with language learning opportunities. However it can be assumed that regardless of their negative effects, IRF sequences could indeed benefit language learning contexts in some ways. The reason is the fact IRF sequences assign a response turn for students to produce a response. As one of the harshest critics of IRF

sequences, Waring (2009) along with his criticism on IRF sequences, strongly appreciated their value.

Here we turn the discussion to a modified version of IRF sequences which fails to possess even these minor benefits. These modified versions of IRF sequences were labeled as ISRF sequences. Now we intend to draw a link between ISRF sequences and our operational conception of language learning opportunities. Learning is believed to be a totally complex phenomenon in the framework of Vygotskian psychology. Therefore, evaluating any learning event from this perspective necessitates the practice of having in mind a wide range of beliefs and concepts. Generally learning is a socially situated activity within which participants get engaged in a joint construction of a common knowledge. Operating in this way, more competent peers try to provide scaffolded help to less competent peer. It is compulsory for such help to be in the ZPD of the less competent party. By the same token, less competent peers appropriate the mediated language of the expert peers in the process of internalization.

Examining ISRF sequences based on such Vygotskian principles, leads to uncovering sharp discrepancies between function of ISRF sequences and phenomena underlying socio-culturalisim. Such contradictions can be regarded as evident clues as to why ISRF sequences are believed here to possess greatly detrimental effects.

Initiation move of ISRF sequences exactly correspond to I move of IRF sequences. It actually projects an exchange which is directed to students of class as was the case with IRF sequences. Nonetheless, forthcoming moves are of completely different nature in ISRF sequences.

As we showed in before, when Reza delivers his second turn, he is actually getting involved in a social event with his teacher. But the social event underway is of no value from sociocultural perspective. The fact is that Reza has no right or chance in this turn to help teacher to locate his ZPD. Therefore, it can be argued that Reza, by no means, will manage to internalize teacher C's mediated language owing to the following principles.

First he had neither chance nor right to exercise his own curiosity in situ. Therefore, he might resist such a response because he received it without trying to seek for it. Moreover, it's against Goodwin's (2007, as cited in Waring, 2009, p. 815)"occasioned knowledge exploration" in which learners themselves get down on exploring the needed response. Second, considering the fact that ZPD possess a dynamic nature, there is no evidence on teacher's part to guarantee his response is, indeed, in Reza's ZPD in that specific moment. Prior to his response teacher has, in fact, no idea about how Reza might undertake such a meaning making process. Therefore, his response is in position that is not sensitive to Reza's ZPD.

Third, one of the fruitful moments for learning is when the object of learning evolves from the students themselves. As Waring (2009) maintains students might alienate from such a response simply on the grounds that it does not belong to him. Forth, teacher C is actually superimposing his response to Reza at this special point. Without waiting to receive willingness from Reza to give a response on behalf of him, teacher C is pre-emptively loading his response on him. As Hawkins puts, a rich learning environment is where teacher bends towards the students to grasp their understandings before getting the students converge to his own expert understandings. Therefore, teacher's response in that special case might lead to any microgenetic development.

All those above-mentioned anti-pedagogical qualities can be easily traced in any ISRF sequences. Therefore, it can be strongly claimed that ISRF sequences are anti-pedagogical sequences on the basis of aforementioned reasons along with some other reasons which are latent at the moment. Another anti-pedagogical feature of ISRF sequences is the fact that they shift the feedback provision role for students which is mostly limited to a single TCU.

The present study was actually intended to investigate the correlation between IRF sequences. It was discussed that IRF sequences have been criticized harshly within the field of language teaching. Afterwards, our finding managed to cast light on two related issues concerning IRF sequences. First was the fact that IRF sequences do actually undergo internal changes. And the second is that their changes have potential to double or triple the detrimental impact of the whole sequence. The reason of such degree of detriments is that within IRF sequences, students are bereft of even response turns. That is to say, these sequences strongly obstruct learning opportunities of students. Therefore, teachers should create rich participation contexts where students are provided with multiple opportunities to easily grasp the speaking floor and manage the discourse and to choose when they want to speak. Working in this way, they can provide invaluable space for students to practice the skills needed for the realities of the target society. Based on our findings, it is compulsory for teacher to exclude ISRF sequences on the grounds that these sequences have potential to destroy any participation opportunities nearby. It is also advisable for teachers to help students to build on previous utterances, to engage others (specifically low achievers) in interaction, to negotiate in the current discussions of the classroom, and in some instances to offer them extended wait-time.

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