Teacher-Student Communicative Patterns in an English Language Class —Examination of Classroom Discourse

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Abstract

This study investigates the teacher-student communicative patterns in an English class in a junior high school. The major research questions of the study include（1）what is the discourse genre in the class?（2）What are the characteristics of teacher's turns and student turns?（3）what is the floor management in this class?

The subjects of the study were junior high school students and an English teacher. One class session was observed, audiotaped, and videotaped. Collected data were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Based on the findings, the discourse genre is teacher-initiated IRE. The question type most frequently used in this English class is WH-questions. Student turns are a direct response to teacher's initiation. They are short, brief and limited to only one turn. Students seldom answer serial questions. As for the floor management in this class, turns which are teacher-selected are reacted more positively. "What else?" "Somebody else?" and "OK" are often used as an end of teacher-student exchange. Pedagogical implications are made in the end.

Key Words：communicative patterns, classroom discourse, turn-taking, floor management, discourse genre

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英文課師生溝通模式—檢視課堂論述形式

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摘　要

　　本文探究中學英文課上師生溝通模式。主要研究問題有（1）課堂論述型式為何？（2）教師與學生對答的特色分別為何？（3）在這課堂上發言權的管理為何？

　　本研究的對象是一位英文老師及他的班級學生。本研究採用的方法是觀察教師上課情形，將英文課上課情形全程錄影、錄音並轉譯為英文稿並依其對話功能編碼分析。　本研究結果是論述形式是老師引導之 IRE，教師問問題的形式經常是 WH-的問題。學生回答教師的問題的特色偏向於直接、簡短的答案而且與老師的對答次數只限一次，老師極少問學生一連串的問題。　學生的發言通常是由老師決定的，只要是老師決定的學生對話大多會得到正面的回應。"還有嗎？"　"有其他學生要回答嗎?"和"OK"通常是老師用來結束與學生對話且做為下一次對話的開始用語。最後的部分是對教學的建議。

關鍵詞：溝通模式、課堂論述、依次輪流、發言權管理、論述形式

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I、INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis has played a vital role in the modern theory of linguistics. It has drawn many investigations and discussions in the area of second language acquisition. In this area, classroom discourse deals with the communication between teacher and students in L2 classroom setting（Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1997. The source of discourse comes from the language itself; the words and the sentences or their references. However, the analysis larger than the linguistics features has drawn much attention; some researchers have extended this area of study to the function of the communication. The research of the discourse analysis focuses on the function unit of communication instead of the analysis on the sentence level. One sub-area of discourse analysis has come to be known as conversational analysis. Conversation is necessary when one talks with the other. A conversation can also be regarded as speech acts. In order to accomplish a series of speech acts, the two speakers of a conversation need to abide by organizational rules—when to change roles, when to interrupt, when to imply the end of conversation. The rules they abide by is according to the "cooperative principle" （Yu, 1993）.Brown also looks at conversation analysis from a social perspective, which is an "interactive and interpersonal nature of communication." He refers important conventions of conversation such as attention getting, topic nomination, topic development, turning-taking, and topic termination, in which turn-taking is a signal that "culturally oriented sets of rules that require finely turned perceptions in order to communicate effectively"（Brown, 2000）.

Hicks also defines discourse as socially situated. She thinks teachers and children mutually shape the formal academic discourse in the classroom. "There have been some efforts to incorporate the explicit teaching of academic genres into literacy instruction." Classroom tasks or social activities are where children learn

academic discourse by repeated participation. They are some forms of discourse and social roles in classes that students must identify and learn. Through these activities, students learn how to behave themselves in the academic setting --- how to say, when to say and when to stop. "Children have to be attuned to any number of contextualization cues in order to participate successfully in classroom discussions"（Hicks, 1995）.

Much research has been done in classroom discourse analysis in Taiwan: Hung investigates teaching procedures and types in two language classes. One is student-centered and the other teacher-centered. In the teacher-centered classroom, students are offered many chances to interpret the texts.　However, they remain passive, waiting to be called　（Hung, 1999）. Ku studies on the functions of teachers' repetitions in EFL classroom. She finds that the two teachers she observes made fewer expanded, bilingual and reduced repetitions（Ku, 1997）. Wei examines teachers' strategies used in the classroom. He finds that inexperienced teachers tend to ignore student's needs and exercise large control over students（Wei, 1996）. Lin's study aims at investigating and comparing questioning strategies used by experienced and less experienced EFL teachers. The question type most frequently used in EFL classrooms is WH-question, and next to it is serial-question type. The main function of teacher's questions is to elicit responses from students which are expected by the teacher. In the classroom, negotiated interactions are seldom seen （Lin, 1996）. Huang's study investigates the functions of teacher talk by analyzing teacher-student interaction in a junior high school English classroom. The findings show that experienced teachers talk more than 60% of the total class period and the less-experienced teacher's talking time occupies more than 75% of the class session. Most of the interactions are teacher-determined and most students' interactive activities focus on responding moves　（Huang, 1997）. Wu's study

explores junior high school EFL floor management. She finds that the teacher allocates turns in the instructional period. They scarcely occur in pre- and post-instructional period（Wu, 1997）.

The importance and roles of communicative patterns between teachers and students in classrooms have been a subject of many contemporary studies in the field of classroom discourse（Gutierrez, 1994; Wells, 1993）. Throughout the examination, I take Hicks' position. It is through a certain discourse genre that an academic "content knowledge" is established. What considers as "good" or "bad" depends on "the social appropriateness of a response" from teachers and peers （Hicks, 1995 ）. To guide this research, I developed three questions directly connected to communicative patterns and their importance in the example of classroom discourse. First, what is the discourse genre in the class? Next, what are the characteristics of teacher's turns and student turns? The final question that this study led to is what the floor management in this class is? What and who decides the quality of a turn and how it begins and ends?
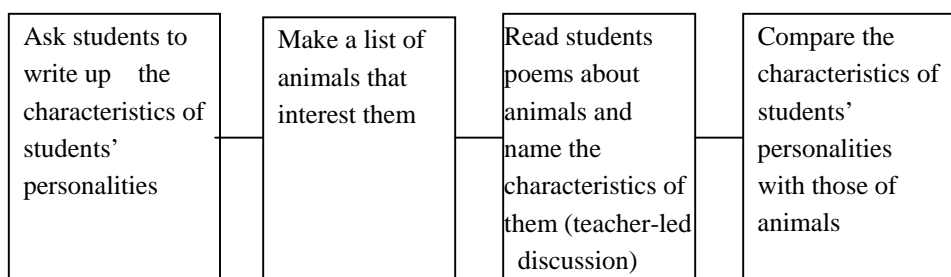
II、METHOD

1、Data Source

The data source of this study was from a videotape of an English classroom in a junior high school. A second-grade English teacher was invited to participate in this study. After several classroom observations, the teacher consented to make one of her class sessions videotaped. During the videotaping of the class, the researcher was not in the classroom to avoid disturbing the class. The class session lasted 50 minutes and the videotape was transcribed into texts.

2、Setting and Lesson Plan

The lesson plan consisted of reading poems and writing activities.   In this 50

minute class, the teacher asked students to think of their personalities and to write some adjectives to describe their personal traits on a piece of paper. Then, the teacher asked them to write a list of animals that students felt interested in. Next, she introduced some animals by reading poems aloud to students and instructed students to think of some characteristics of those animals. She made students associate their personal traits to those animals and write a poem "The Animal in Me." During the poem-reading session, she offered some oral feedbacks to students. The four instructional procedures are as follows:（See Graph 1）

（Graph 1）

Ask students to write up the characteristics of students' personalities	Make a list of animals that interest them	Read students poems about animals and name the characteristics of them (teacher-led discussion)	Compare the characteristics of students' personalities with those of animals

What students wrote on the papers were the personal characteristics, listed animals, and created poems entitled "The Animal in Me." After the reading of the poems, the discussions were led by the teacher.

3、Coding systems in this study

（1）General codes

In order to represent the classroom discourse, coding systems are crucial to the analysis. The first set of codes is for who is speaking—T for teacher, Ss for multiple students and S1, S2…for single and different student.

In addition, [ ] is coded for words spoken at the time,（？）for researcher's uncertainty of the utterance, （italicized）for contextual information,（　）for incomprehensible speech, dash- for cut-off words,（words）for whom the teacher is talking to.

（2）Discourse genre---IRE/IRF and its Functions

IRE/ IRF is termed by Hicks（1995） by indicating the process of teacher questioning, student answering and a follow-up move by the teacher. I （Initiation）, R（Response）, E（Evaluation）or F（Feedback） form a questioning cycle in language classroom.

Since one of the analyses is communicative patterns between teacher and students, some functions of teacher's pedagogical moves IRE/IRF are coded in order to facilitate the discussion. （E） for teacher's evaluation, （R） for teacher's repetition/ rephrasing of student's answer, （NR） for no response from the teacher,（C） for clarification or correction by the teacher of a student's answer,（X）for teacher's expansion/addition to student's response, （T） for teacher analysis or opinion, （A） for students' request for clarification/repetition, or （D） for teacher's disciplinary measures.

（3）Selection of Teachers' Turn Allocation

A coding system that gives information on how students' turns are selected is made in order to represent the turn-taking structures in the dialogue between teacher and students. If the teacher verbally selected the student, it is marked with a "V". If the teacher uses a gesture such as nod, look or others, "G" is marked. "ss" is labeled if the turns are self-selected by the student.

4、Limitations of this study

There are some limitations of this research: this study achieves a relatively low degree of success in knowing the teacher's belief in teaching and whether the lesson plan is matched up with her course design. In addition, the teaching performance and students' responses are based on a videotaped class session. Therefore, the general teaching performance of this teacher and students' attitudes/evaluation are not made known in this study.

On the other hand, some difficulties were met when the researcher transcribed the 50 minutes of the videotape. The stationary camera was set up at the back of the classroom. However, it was because the researcher was not in the classroom while the English class was proceeding, some students were out of sight of the camera. The result was that it was difficult to differentiate who was speaking in the class. Besides, some students who were seated farther away were hard to be observed through the videotape and their voices were unintelligible through the microphone. When some students talked at the time, it was hard for the researcher to discern their simultaneous speech. It was rather hard to transcribe students' simultaneous utterances as the teacher was talking to one student.

III、DISCUSSION

1、Discourse genre

The process of teacher questioning, student answering and a follow-up move by the teacher forms a questioning cycle in most of language classrooms.　IRE/F is therefore termed by Hicks （1995） and Wells （1993）, indicating that classrooms have stable discourse genres --triadic dialogue-- a form of teacher-student communicative patterns either in talking or writing.　In this study, we find that this triadic dialogue occupies the largest portion of classroom discourse here.

As revealed in this study of the discussion of the third poem, the teacher's initiation, the question "What're characteristics of [an animal]?" is answered by six individuals and the teacher evaluates the response of each before she moves on to the next student.

Excerpt 1:

（I, teacher's initiation; R, student's response; E/F, teacher's evaluation/feedback）

I	T:	OK, what're the characteristics of a snake, Kim?
R	S1:	Moves slowly.
E	T:	Moves slowly.
I		What else?
R	S2:	Moves very little.
E	T:	Moves very little. Kathryn.
R	S3:	Swaying by their toes.
F	T:	They hang in the trees.
I		Somebody else?
R	S4:	Slow as （　）.
E	T:	OK.
I		Joe?
R	S5:	They think about a question for a year.
E	T:	OK.
I		Andy?
R	S6:	They have to wait a year before they can talk.
E	T:	OK.

As shown in the interaction between the teacher and students, the cycle of a teacher's question, a student reply, the teacher's follow-up move repeats. A question "what're the characteristics of a snake?" is usually followed by teacher's selection of students. Also, "what else" functions as an initiation of the IRE cycle. We also find that the question type most frequently used in this English class is WH-questions.

It may be arbitrary if we only examine the 30-second interaction between teacher-student communication. The result found in this study is that 89.7%, or 145 of the 162, teacher-student exchanges can be categorized as teacher-initiated IRE/F in the 50-minite class session. However, though IRE/F genre is distinctive in this class, there are teacher-student exchanges that vary from this leading genre, including 11 student-initiated exchanges and 5 exchanges that end in disciplinary, rather than evaluative or follow-up responses. One of these exchanges occurs when the first poem is discussed.

　　Excerpt 2:

I　　T:　　They're black. What else?

R　　S7:　　[They like homework or something like that]

　　　　T:　　I didn't call on you, Jacob.

I　　S7:　　[I was just wondering, 'cause every time] you look up,

　　　　　　　you look over here at me like I was doing something wrong,

　　　　　　　or something.

R　　T:　　（to S7）　No, I was not looking at you.

In this example, we find a student-initiated exchange between S7 and the teacher. However, S7 misunderstands that the teacher is calling on him and complains about teacher's attitudes toward him. The teacher then defends herself by saying that she is not asking the students for answers. This interaction deviates from the prevailing teacher-initiated IRE/F norms in the class and the student's affective need is ignored in the instance by the teacher, who keeps on asking other student for reply.

2、Examination of Teacher's Turn

The teacher plans to finish reading each poem and asks students to list the characteristics of the animal in the poem. In the case of reading of the poem "Cat in

Moonlight," the teacher initiates "What're the characteristics of a cat?, " to which several students respond.

Again, the question is an elicitation of students' "brief" response to the text that she has just presented to the class.   As we have discussed in the discourse genre, the teacher in this section never digresses from this initiation.   In eight cases, the phrase "What else?" are used to begin the triad dialog.   In the examinations of the transcription, the findings reveal that what she requests from students is more general information about a certain animal than the analysis, reasoning or elaboration about the poems. Though there are exchanges, no real negotiated interactions in the class. In addition, the teacher's intention to ignore students who are out of turns are seen.

Another characteristic of the teacher' talk is that the discourse genre is more representative of IRE than of IRF.   In order to examine the nature of these turns, the turns are coded in line with their functions including evaluation, repetition, expansion, clarification, request for clarification/repetition of student response, teacher analysis or opinion, or disciplinary response.（See Table 1）

Excerpt 3

T: OK, Drew.（E）

S8:   They're annoying

T: OK（E）, they're annoying.（R） [They always seem to be in
            large groups, you know].（X）They perch in the trees.（X）

S8:   [They eat all the food.]

T: （NR）

Table 1

Functions	Percents out of All Teacher's Third Follow-up Move （%）
Repetition/rephrase （R）	39.8
Evaluation（E）	28.3
Request for clarification/repetition （A）	9.5
No response （NR）	7.4
Clarification（C）	6.8
Expansion（X）	5.3
Disciplinary response （D）	2.1
Teacher analysis/opinion （T）	0.8

According to Wells, the third move of IRF is defined as teacher' reactions to "extend, draw out of the significance, or to make connections"（Wells, 1993）. In contrast, the third move of IRE is evaluative in nature. In this study, the analysis of the third move of teacher-initiated triads attributes to the type of Initiation-Response-Evaluation（IRE） than of Initiation-Response-Follow-up （IRF）. As shown in Table 1, the evaluation and repetition make up 68.1% of the teacher's comments while only 5.3% are teacher expansions of student statements. We also find that about half of the repetitious measures are exact repetitions. The teacher makes fewer expanded repetitions. The teacher's requests for clarification or repetition from students add up less than 9.5% of the third follow-up move. Excerpt 4 is the sample of the teacher's requests for clarification or repetition:

Excerpt 4

S9:   Um, they like to move their heads so they can keep the thing that
       they're looking at focused.

T: They what? （A）

S9:   They move their heads.

In this study of classroom discourse, we can hardly find examples of further analysis or opinion.   The teacher does not use her turns to extend or bring out the significance of the poems. Instead, most of her parts are used for acknowledgements of student answers.

Even in the case of two expansions of student comments found in the sample, these elements are not really present:

Excerpt 5

T: OK, Drew.（E）

S8:   They're annoying

T: OK（E）, they're annoying.（R）[They always seem to be in large
       groups, you know].（X） They perch in the trees.（X）

Excerpt 6

S9:   White.（？）

S10:   Blue.（？）

T: They're white, OK（E）, or blue（R）; they can be different
       colors. They mentioned several different colors.（X）

In the Excerpt 6, the teacher does add some information to the color. However, the teacher does not involve the students in the discussion because the information is not largely elaborated, nor is it related to the significance of the color. The teacher soon confines the role of students as one who answers only

simple questions. With all these facts presented, the discourse genre attributes more to the type of initiation-response-evaluation.

Outside of the confines of the IRE/IRF, requests for clarification and repetitions occupy 9.5% of the teacher turns. Other functions of teacher turns include no response to student questions, teacher clarification, expansion, disciplinary response and teacher analysis/opinion. All these together, however, make up less than 22.4% of teacher turns.

3、Examination of student turns

（1）Direct response to teacher's initiation

As discussed before, it is the teacher-initiated IRE that is the modal discourse genre in this classroom discourse. The student's turn in the IRE is typically a direct response to the teacher's initiation. Excerpt 7 is the typical sample.

Excerpt 7:

I　T:　OK, what're the characteristics of a snake, Kim?

R　S1:　Moves slowly.

E　T:　Moves slowly.

I　　　What else?

R　S2:　Moves very little.

E　T:　Moves very little. Kathryn.

R　S3:　Swaying by their toes.

F　T:　They hang in the trees.

I　　　Somebody else?

R　S4:　Slow as （　）.

E　T:　OK.

I　　　Joe?

R   S5:   They think about a question for a year.

E   T: OK.

I   Andy?

R   S6:   They have to wait a year before they can talk.

E   T: OK.

（2）Students replies are short and brief

In the Excerpt 7, student turns in the above conversation are short and brief; the average number of words for all student turns in the dialogue examined in this study is 5.45 words for one turn. This number is much smaller than the average number of words for one teacher turn, which is 12.0（the words in the poems read are not counted in the average number of words per turn）.

（3）Limited to one turn

A third characteristic to the student replies is that they are limited to one turn. As revealed in Excerpt 7, the dialog between S1 and the teacher is limited to only one turn. So are S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6. Once the student answers the question assigned by the teacher, she shifts the turn to another student.

（4）Students answer WH-questions instead of serial questions

The fourth important observation to be made is that the questions that students reply are WH-questions. The typical question raised here is "what're the characteristics of a XX [an animal]?" The teacher does not follow students answers to make further questions or feedbacks. Instead, the question "what're the characteristics of a XX?" is repeated many times.

4、Floor Management

According to Wu's study（Wu, 1997）, "seven major functions of teachers' floor management were found: checking students' knowledge, getting students' attention, introducing a topic, taking pressure off the nominated students, sustaining the interaction, moving the lesson forward, and maintaining the floor." In her study, she finds that the teacher she observes usually used "accepting strategy" in case of students' violation of teacher' turn-allocation and the teachers resorts to the "sanctioning strategy" the least. Therefore, in this study, I am also interested in the teacher's floor management in this study in order to be more aware of the ways that student turns are selected and of the ways that the dialog between teacher-student end.

（1）Selection of student turns

Before the teacher's floor management is discussed, it is necessary to look at the way the turn-taking is structured. The first step is to examine how student turns are selected. A coding system for each student's turn is created:（ss）for self-selected,（V）for the child's having been verbally chosen by the teacher,（G）for students' being chosen by the teacher's look or gesture. Table 2 shows the percentages of student turns that are selected by each method. On the other hand, in the third column of the Table 2, the percentage of turns of each method which is reacted positively by the teacher is also shown.

Table 2

Ways Student Turns Are Selected	% out of the total student turns in teacher-student exchanges	% of turns of each way reacted to positively by teacher
Gesture, look, etc.（G） by teacher	52.2	91.7
initiated verbally by teacher （V）	23.9	100
self-selection（ss）	23.9	45.5

The addition of the two teacher-selected categories is three times the number of students' self-selected turns. Furthermore, as reflected in Table 2, it is obvious that the way of selection of turns determines the teacher's floor management. The teacher responds positively if the student turns are verbally selected by her or acknowledged by her gesture and look. However, only 45.5% of self-selection of student turns are reacted positively. This number is markedly different from that of teacher-selected turns. We may here conclude that many of unsuccessful attempts at teacher-student interactions are determined by the teacher.

（2）Ways of ending teacher-student dialogs

In addition to the selection of turns, we also need to scrutinize the ways that teacher-student dialogues end so as the role of the teacher is identified. In this class, the teacher, as analyzed earlier, is a question prompter. The teacher not only raises the question "What are the characteristics of a snake [or animals] but also she controls the length of students' turns. In Excerpt 8, we see that "What else?" "Somebody else?" "OK" are often used as an end of teacher-student exchange.

Excerpt 8:

S11（V）: They screech.（？）

T   : They screech, they call.   Chris.

S12（V）: They squawk really loud.

T   : They squawk, they're loud.   What else?

S13（G）: Some are left behind.

T   : OK（E）.

S14（G）:   People— when I was I was real little, people used to say that they saw a crow and it kept on saying "Carl, Carl, Carl."

T   :   OK（E）, Drew.

In the final turn of the exchange with S11, the teacher repeats and rephrases the student response and then verbally selects S12 to speak. The exchange with S12 ends when the teacher asks "What else?" of the class. She requests another student to speak in order to hear other response by pointing at someone to speak with a gesture. Again, she does not offer any comments or explanations to students' answers. In the next exchange with S13, we hear the teacher selecting him by pointing at him and ending the exchange by saying the evaluative term "OK." OK plays a role in turn-taking at least two more ways, as is evident in the Excerpt 8, both of which coincide with the beginning and ending of turns.　As it signals the end of the teacher's turn, it also serves as a sequence into the next student turn.

IV、IMPLICATIONS

Students learn the academic discourse in the classroom—not only are they instructed the content knowledge of the course but also they take the cues from the teacher in order to give right answers at right time.　In the case of this English class, the discussion of a poem about a certain animal indicates the communicative patterns from three aspects:

1、Social Roles

As far as the roles taken by the teacher and students are concerned, the teacher acts her role as a topic controller and an answer evaluator while students are cue followers.　Students are not encouraged to become a self-selected speaker and they are guided to give a short and brief answer.

2、Modes of activity

In terms of activity, it is considered a process-based writing activity. The task students are working on is a piece of writing on the comparison and contrast of

students' personalities and the animals discussed. In the poem-reading section, the interactions between teacher-student are pre-determined and is limited to one turn.

3、Discourse genre

In the examination of The IRE sequence, this mode of instruction has come to be associated with a "skill and drill" training. The discussion and most of the turn allocations are teacher-led. Though the communication is going on, there is little teacher-student interaction. In this class, student responses are elicited by the teacher; however, they are not elaborated upon or offered further analysis.

What is considered right/wrong or significant/invaluable in a class shape students' ideas of the social norms.   In this example of the English language class, the communication practices are focused the discourse genre, the nature of the turn-taking and the floor management. Our findings show that the discourse genre is teacher-initiated IRE; most of the turns are teacher-selected; the ending of teacher-student exchange is also teacher-determined. This class is fast-moving and highly controlled by the teacher—the teacher does exercise considerable control over who is speaking, when to speak and what is addressed by the students. Their comments are not acknowledged by the teacher or do not follow by the positive feedbacks from the teacher.

The pedagogical implications made in this study is not that teachers ought to modify effectively to student responses and ask more serial questions related to the significance to the texts or to promote more negotiated interactions in the class. It is studied for more reflections about teacher-student communicative patterns in the hope to raise our consciousness of classroom discourse in language classes.

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