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Teacher Interruptions and Limited Wait Time in EFL Young Learner Classrooms

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Abstract

In human interaction, change of speakership becomes natural at certain points in utterances called Transition Relevance Places (TRPs), and if a listener steps in at a point that is not a TRP, an interruption, and thus a potential trouble may emerge. In an EFL classroom, a teacher can create learning opportunities by managing interaction successfully, with awareness of TRPs and potential interruptions. Lack of this awareness, conversely, may lead to teacher interruptions and limited student participation. This paper attempts to show how teachers' interruptions and limited wait-time practices affect learner participation and learning opportunities in EFL young learner classrooms. The data consist of transcriptions of video recorded classroom interactions that come from three fifth grade intermediate level classrooms. The findings revealed that teachers' interruptions and limited wait-time obstructed learner participation and learning opportunities in both form-and-accuracy and meaning-and-fluency contexts (Seedhouse, 2004). The results demonstrate that teachers' use of language and their Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC, Walsh 2006) are crucial for providing sufficient learning space and facilitating learner engagement. Implications are discussed for teacher education and teachers' CIC.

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1. Introduction

Classroom interaction has been investigated for more than fifty years in terms of complex relationship among language, interaction and learning (Walsh, 2011). Portrayed as an example of institutional interaction, classroom

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interaction bears certain institutional characteristics with great flexibility and variability (Seedhouse, 2004). In our context, the core institutional goal is to be able to teach the L2 to the language learners. The issue that teachers' use of language constructs or obstructs language learning has received considerable critical attention by many researchers especially interested in classroom discourse and classroom interaction from a CA perspective (Thornbury, 1996; Cullen, 1998; Cazden, 2001; Walsh, 2002, 2006, 2011; Waring, 2008; Yaqubi & Rokni, 2012; Walsh & Li, 2013; Can-Doşkın, 2015). These studies reported that teachers' use of language or teacher talk has pivotal importance in terms of student participation and learning opportunities. Therefore, this research aims to specifically examine to what extent teacher's interruptions that are not at the TRPs and limited wait-time hinder or facilitate student participation. The following section is dedicated to the review of literature on turn constructional units, transition relevance place, teacher interruption and limited wait time.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Turn-taking structure in CA, TCU and TRP

Sacks et al. (1974) published a seminal work on conversational turn-taking to make sense of speech-exchange systems. To simply put, the rules in ordinary conversations are as follows: first the current speaker selects the next speaker, second the next speaker self-selects and third the current speaker continues. However, this conversational turn-taking system is not the same in other exchange systems like language classrooms. For instance, as McHoul (1985) maintained that the next speaker self-selects rule is not accessible to student next speakers and the current speaker selects next speaker option is only possible for them as current speakers to a minimum extent (as cited in Gardner, 2013; Ingram & Elliot, 2014). As explicated by Clayman (2013), turns amount to turn-constructional units (TCU henceforth), such as sentences, clauses, phrases and individual words. Each TCU is a coherent and considered as possibly complete. When a TCU is completed, it is followed by a TRP which makes a change of speakership possible (ibid). Relevance of transitions is found at the end of constructional units. However, TRP does not have to occur at the end of each TCU. Speaker B does not initiate to take the floor in the first opportunity rather s/he waits till the end of second TCU to take the floor and form another TCU which will possibly be extended to another turn. The projection of a TRP can be foreshadowed by certain elements in advance: syntax, prosody, pragmatics, and nonvocal aspects (Selting, 2000; Clayman, 2013). These elements help the speaker to decide when and where to intervene to the conversation; therefore, they have an impact upon the developing course of the interaction. Since the current study attempts to analyse the teacher interruptions that are not at TRP places and their potential for constructing or obstruction student participation along with limited wait-time, the second part of the literature is dedicated to teacher interruption and wait-time studies within the scope of teacher talk for student participation.

2.2. Teacher interruption and wait-time

In recent years, there is a great deal of research investigating the relationship between teacher talk and learning opportunities (Musumeci, 1996; Walsh, 2002, 2006; Lee, 2007; Waring, 2008; İnceçay, 2010; Walsh & Li, 2013; Can-Doşkın, 2015). Although teacher interruption or filling in the blanks that are not at TRPs has not been directly investigated in the literature, there are many studies delving into teacher talk with regards to facilitation or hindrance for learner involvement. For instance, Musumeci (1996) suggested that little or no negotiation was observed in the data. Rather, the majority of exchanges were carried out via display questions; teachers rarely asked elicitation questions but filled in the gaps instead. Moreover, Walsh (2002) showed that teacher's talk can construct learner involvement by direct error correction, giving content feedback, checking for confirmation, extending wait time, and scaffolding. In the same study he also provided empirical evidence for teachers' obstructing learner involvement due to teacher echo, turn completion and teacher interruption. Similarly, İnceçay (2010) analysed teacher talk under two categories: construction or obstruction. The results demonstrated that direct error correction, content feedback, prompting, extended wait time and repairing are some strategies teacher used for constructing learner involvement; on the other hand, turn completion, teacher echo and extended use of initiation, response and feedback (IRF henceforth) inhibited learners from getting involved into the interaction. Furthermore, Walsh and Li (2013) examined ways the teachers contribute for learning opportunities and learner involvement. They suggested that increased wait-

time, extended learner turns, and increased planning time contributed for learner participation. Also, the study evidenced that learner contributions were shaped with the use of scaffolding, paraphrasing, and reiterating. Finally, Can-Daşkın (2015) analysed how learner contributions were shaped by repeating, translating, extending, clarifying, summarising, modelling and paraphrasing along with clarified requests, confirmation checks, elaborating questions and effective use of board.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

In order to collect data for the present study, three intermediate level EFL classes consisting of approximately 25 students were video recorded for six hours by means of a video camera placed on a tripod at the back of the classroom (45 minutes each). Before collecting data, a written consent was taken from the participants. Once granting the permission, the steps proposed by Richards (2003) were followed. First, explanations were roughly made regarding the rationale to record the lessons without being too specific about the focus of the study. Second, teachers were offered the opportunity to see the transcripts of the recorded lessons. Third, they were asked whether they would like to be informed about the findings of the study or not. Three English teachers took part in this study. Two teachers held BA degrees and their work experience with EFL young learners were four years respectively. On the other hand, the other teacher held MA degree and had 11 years of teaching English to young learner experience. The common materials used in these classrooms were the student's book, workbook, worksheets and CD players. As to the skills, listening, reading and grammar were largely observed in all recorded classes.

Concerning the reliability and validity issues of data collection tools, primary data and analyses of researchers are available in their publication. This availability in CA research methodology allows opportunity for other researchers to analyse the extracts and test the results and procedures applied by the author in his/her work. By doing so, CA methodology ensures transparency and replicability of the result (Seedhouse, 2005). In relation to validity issue, Seedhouse (2005) claimed that since a CA analyst brings evidence only from interactional details in the data and does not make any claims what the data do not empirically show, these details and empirical evidence provide the internal reliability of the study. Furthermore, he suggested that although CA methodology analyses individual interactional instances, these instances refer to the universal feature of interaction which renders external validity of the research (ibid).

3.2. Data analysis

In order to analyse the video recorded data, CA methodology was adopted in the present study. Seedhouse (2005) described CA as a methodology for the analysis of naturally-occurring spoken interaction which has become a multi-disciplinary methodology applied in multiple professional and academic fields (Sacks et al., 1974; Wong, 2000; Markee, 2000; Walsh, 2002, 2006, 2012; Stivers, 2006; Pekarek Doehler & Ziegler, 2007). First recordings were made by use of one camera placed on a tripod situated at the back of the classrooms; second the data were transcribed using Jefferson's transcription conventions (in Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) by means of Transana 3.00 version; third choosing three representative extracts based on a collection of repetitive cases, and fourth disseminating the findings.

4. Findings

In this part, three cases which come from both form and accuracy and meaning and fluency contexts are explained line by line bases. The following extract comes from a meaning and fluency context and starts with teacher's pointing at a picture in the student's book and asking a known information question to S8.

Extract 1: Talking about a picture

1 T: a:nd there is another picture here.
2 +points at the picture in the book
3 (0.5)

4 ↑burcu, how many people are there?
 5 S8: seven ay eight.
 6 T: eight (0.3) where ↑are they bilgin? (0.4) where are they?
 7 (0.5)
 8 are they at school?
 9 S7: no.
 10 +shakes head
 11 T: at café? (0.3)
 12 S7: no=
 13 T: =they are at home. OK, and what are they doing melisa? (0.4)
 what are they doing?

In Extract 1, teacher points at a picture in student's book and asks how many people there are in the picture after waiting for half a second in lines 1, 2 and 3. S8 gives the correct answer after self-initiated self-repair with a change of state token "ay". In line 6 teacher echoes correct answer by saying "eight" and after a short pause she turns to another student and tries to involve him by asking a known information question "where are they?" twice following almost a half second. After waiting half a second in line 8, teacher suggests an option about where the students are in the picture. In line 9, S7 briefly comments "no" by embedding gestures to accompany to his response. In line 11, teacher tries to suggest another option by saying "at café?". This alternative question receives a "no" response and after a minimal contribution from S7 teacher interrupts by latching and gives the correct answer.

The second extract is about the name of the grammar topic. S8 and S23 try to clarify the name of the topic switching to Turkish. Although teacher responds his question in English in lines 13 and 16, teacher switches to Turkish to stop new questions from coming but she ends up with switching to Turkish in line 18 and switches back to English in lines 22 and 24.

Extract 2: Present perfect tense

1 S8: ((raises hand))
 2 T: yes honey.
 3 S8: Mrs Güçlü uhm.
 4 (0.5)
 5 perfect
 6 (4.0)
 7 present particle değil miydi bu?
 8 *isn't this perfect present particle?*
 9 (2.0)
 10 T: huh?
 11 S8: şey ((inaudible))
 12 well
 13 T: for example you mean progressive?
 14 (1.4)
 15 S8: uhm. present particle=
 16 T: =present perfect tense
 17 (1.3)
 18 konunun adına çok takılmayın isterseniz
 19 *don't be obsessed with the name of the topic if you like*
 20 S23: hocam şunu soruyor=
 21 *teacher he asks that*
 22 T: =participle verb three
 23 (0.5)
 24 participle.

Initiating his turn in line 1, S8 raises his hand and grabs teacher's attention. In line 3, although he starts in English he switches to Turkish after hesitating for more than 4 seconds. In line 10, teacher makes a request for clarification (huh) then in line 11 he initiates another turn in Turkish. In line 13, without complying with his change of linguistic source teacher provides an alternative for S8. After waiting 1.4 seconds he initiates another turn in English then teacher latches at a transitionally irrelevant place and switches to Turkish to end up this conversation (konunun adına çok takılmayın isterseniz/ *don't be obsessed with the name of the topic if you like*). Following this, in line 20 S23 initiates a turn in Turkish in order to clarify S8's message, then in line 22 teacher interrupts him and switches to English (=participle verb three). As can be deduced from Extract 2, teacher's interruptions serve two different purposes. The first interruption in line 16 may be different from the one in line 22 in the sense that the first one could have possibly hindered S8 from completing his sentence and disrupted his learning opportunity; however, the second could have been done on purpose by the teacher to navigate the direction of the discussion and let the student not dwell upon the name of the topic for sake of not missing the point. Although teacher's interruptions could have been done with different purposes, they do not change the result with regards to reducing or interrupting learner contribution.

The last extract took place in a form-and-accuracy context. In Extract 3, teacher teaches phrasal verbs "turn on/off". Teacher asks known information questions about the activity in student's book and makes another interruption by latching at transitionally irrelevant place.

Extract 3: Turn on/off?

1 T: William hasn't turned on the computer a::nd the question
 2 melisa?
 3 (1.2)
 4 is the computer on or off?
 5 S5: off (2.0)
 6 uhm
 7 (3.0)
 8 off.
 9 T: off. excellent. why? becau::se
 10 (1.3)
 11 S5: uhm (0.2) he hasn't turned off=
 12 T: =because he hasn't turned on the computer. great, excellent.

In line 1 teacher invites S5 to give an answer to the question in the workbook. In line 4 teacher reads the question and S5 answers "off" in line 5. She hesitates for three seconds and repeats her response in line 8. Teacher echoes her response in 9 and gives explicit positive feedback to S5 in line 9. Then in the same line teacher wants to extend the turn and asks for elaboration and initiates the turn by prompting "becau::se". Teacher does not interrupt S5 and she starts with a hesitation marker in line 11. After a very brief pause, she starts to give an answer but in line 12 teacher interrupts S5 by latching and giving the answer she asked to S5. More interestingly, despite giving the correct answer, teacher positively evaluates her own response with a positive feedback (great, excellent). This extract seems very odd in terms of teacher's giving positive feedback to her own contribution. Despite the researcher's watching the relevant part repeatedly, she could not find any suprasegmental evidence for the reason why she evaluated her own response by interrupting S5 at a transitionally irrelevant point and obstructing her contribution. In line with Yaqubi and Rokni's (2012) results Extract 3 showed that teacher's F move (feedback) resulted in interrupted and obstructed learner contribution.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study attempted to show the extent to which teacher's interruptions that are not at TRP and limited wait-time affect student participation and learning opportunities. In order to analyse extracts, CA methodology was adopted. Three extracts were chosen on the basis of relevancy. Extracts were chosen from both form-and-accuracy and meaning-and-fluency in order to provide empirical evidence for showing the effect of teacher interruptions and limited wait-time practices on student participation (Seedhouse, 2004). The analyses reveal that teacher's interruptions that

are not at TRPs are followed by minimal student contributions. Although teacher gave sufficient time or repeated her questions when she could not receive an answer, she interrupted when there was a minimal contribution from the students in both form-and-accuracy and meaning-and-fluency contexts. Also, code-switches were observed in the data especially after frequent interruptions by the teacher. Moreover, instead of asking elaboration questions, seeking clarification or repairing learner contributions, teacher opted for echoing and overlapping student contribution. In addition, it was observed in the extracts that teacher's interruptions and providing alternatives for eliciting responses did not warrant any extended learner contribution; on the contrary, it inhibited learners from contributing in the following turns. Furthermore, teacher's interruptions and limited wait-time related obstructions did not show any significant difference in form-and accuracy and meaning-and-fluency contexts throughout the data.

The findings of the current study seem to be consistent with other research which investigated teacher interruption and limited wait-time. As shown by Yaqubi and Rokni (2012), teacher's interruption and limited wait-time played a 'space-closing role' in teacher-student exchanges. In his study Walsh (2002) identified that teacher's interruption or completion is a non-desirable classroom discourse feature since it limits the quantity and quality of student contribution as well as minimising learning opportunities. In the current study, similar results were acquired due to teacher's interruption. Teacher's interruptions consisted of her anticipation about what the learner is about to say and completing his/her turn throughout the data which shows similarity with the findings of Musumeci (1996), Walsh (2002) and Yaqubi and Rokni (2012). Additionally, teacher echo was extensively observed in the current data. According to Walsh (2002), teacher echo is a frequently observed phenomenon in all classrooms and despite serving certain positive purposes, such as extending a student's contribution so that other students can benefit from it, it might cause losing time and obstruct the flow of interaction. In the current data, teacher's echoes did not enable any student participation or show any student uptake. Moreover, IRF structure dominated interaction between the learners and the teacher. İnceçay suggested (2010) extended use of IRF turn taking obstructs learner participation and minimizes learner contribution. Supporting his findings, the extracts in the present study revealed that teacher's strictly following IRF structure, interrupting her own post-expansions moves after receiving responses, though minimal, are the main reasons for not being able to extend learner contribution and involve students into the interaction as a failure. The present data also demonstrated that turn-taking organization was strictly dominated by the teacher. At moments when students could not respond to teacher's question, instead of allocation turn to other students so that the interaction could be amplified, teacher chose to insist on the same student and provided the answer by herself or interrupted student's contribution for sake of receiving the response and continuing chain-questioning other students. As Xie expressed (2011) teachers should apply different ways to acquire more student participation instead of overuse of the same turn allocation mechanism.

These findings may help us to understand teacher's interruptions might have negative impact on student participation unlike some previous studies (Maroni, Gnisici, Pontecorvo, 2008; Walsh, 2011; Al-Zahrani, 2014). In order to minimise this negative effect, teachers should be informed about their practices in the classroom and importance of teacher talk (Walsh, 2002). They should also be informed about CIC which involves increased pauses, acknowledgement of contributions, minimisation of interruption and allowing extended learner turns. Also, responses as the second stage of any turn-taking structure should be effectively evaluated by reformulation, seeking clarification, pushing for more information, and asking more guiding questions instead of filling in the gaps or latching student contributions (Walsh, 2002; 2006; 2011).

In relation to implications for teacher education, there should be a teacher action research and classroom discourse analysis course at an undergraduate level. At least, these two courses should be included in teacher training curriculum since they are crucial in teacher's professional development. Trainee teachers or practicing teachers should get accustomed to monitor their classrooms from an outside perspective by using a video camera or simply asking a colleague to do so, localize their problems and find specific solutions to solve them. As Sert (2015) suggested qualitative data collection tools, such self-reflections or observation reports should be used in order to bring evidence for CIC. Also, they could be encouraged to keep journals. These journals would be helpful to promote their reflective thinking skills since they provide the teachers an insider perspective. It is assumed that these courses would be helpful for the teacher's continuing professional development starting from the pre-service training to life-long learning of teachers.

To the best knowledge of the authors, this study is the first one contributing to teacher interruptions that are not TRPs in EFL young learner classrooms. Being limited to only six hours and involving only fifth grade students, further

work is required to validate and amplify the current results and contribute the understanding of the effect of teacher interruptions and limited wait-time on student participation and learning opportunities.

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English as foreign language (EFL) learners, no matter how much they know about the English language, still face many speaking difficulties. Many studies have indicated that oral language development has largely been neglected in the classroom, and most of the time, oral language in the classroom is used more by teachers than by students. However, oral language, even as used by the teacher, hardly ever functions as a means for students to gain knowledge and explore ideas. To develop the knowledge to deal with oral communication problems in an EFL context, researchers first need to know the real Teaching children can be a rewarding but incredibly challenging task. Between making the lessons interesting and keeping the children's attention for longer than five minutes, there's a lot for teachers in the Young Learners' classrooms to think about. Making lessons interactive and engaging the learners' senses with colour, texture, sound and activities is vital if you are to be successful. Storytelling is one of the oldest and most effective tools for teaching Young Learners. Four tips for using storytelling in the Young Learners classroom. 1. Anchor the learning in the story. A story can be used as a foundation for introducing different learning activities in the classroom. By centring everything around the story, learners will engage more effectively with it. Researches on Second Language Acquisition have shown that learners have differences in mastering skills. While one student is good in drawing, another can be good in expressing ideas verbally; a third other student can be good at role play and imitation. The way the students are seated in the classroom will often determine the dynamics of the lesson. Teachers are advised to use the role- play activity in order to motivate their students and to help the less motivated learners take part in the lesson. Besides, certain tasks in the student's book are followed by a role- play activity where it becomes a necessity to undergo such an activity.