Analysis of Turn Taking and Repair Strategies among Male and Female Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

Some advanced learners of a foreign language may have the difficulty of gaining and holding the floor. This is because of lack of command of the turn taking system. Turn taking is the prominent feature of conversation analysis. Moreover, another strategy which is used to deal with some sort of trouble is repair. The present study sought to focus on turn taking system and repair strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in the classrooms. The participants were selected from 10 EFL classrooms including 9 to 11 male and female students (totally 120) in Gooyesh Institute, Isfahan, Iran. The entire classrooms were equipped with cameras located at the back. The instrument employed was the observation framework proposed by Sack, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Also, four main types of repair, including self-initiated self-completed, self-initiated other-completed, other-initiated self-completed, and other-initiated other-completed were investigated. The data were analyzed through cross tabulation and Chi-Square Tests. The findings of the study showed that female students mostly were chosen by the teacher to speak while self-selection was observed more frequently in male classes. The findings also showed that other-initiated self-completed was a preferred strategy for error treatment in both male and female classrooms. This study could have contributions to practitioners in the field to help them develop guidelines for analysis of conversation and suggest error treatments in classrooms.

Keywords: conversation analysis, gender, repair strategies, turn taking

INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis concerns with the norms and practices applied in social interactions. According to Schegloff (1997), conversation analysis is an approach to social action. The first serious discussions and analyses of conversation emerged during the 1970s. Sacks and Schegloff developed fundamental principles of CA by borrowing from other fields of linguistic and discourse. Recent development in the field has led to uncover the key structural features of talk-in-interaction. These features include turn

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taking, action formation, sequence organization, repair, word selection, and overall structural organization.

Turn taking is an essential prerequisite for CA research. Turn taking maintains a mutual attention among parties involved in a conversation. It plays a key role in social interactions because it lets participants manipulate various effects including, power, empathy, and cooperation. Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson (1974) proposed two systematic organizations for turn taking in conversation, including *Turn Constructional Component* and *Turn Allocational Component.*

In addition to turn taking, several studies investigating conversation analysis have been carried out on different types of repair (Rababah, 2001 & Schegloff, 2007). Speakers try to alleviate their problematic utterances in different ways. "Repair refers to the suspension of ongoing talk; in order to deal with some sort of trouble refers to hearing, production or understanding" (Gee, 1999, p. 130). There are four main types of repair: (a) self-initiated, self-completed, (b) self-initiated, other-completed (c) other-initiated, self-completed, and (d) other-initiated, other-completed. Schegloff (1997) believes that there is a general preference for self-initiated in which the speaker himself identifies the cause of the problem over other-initiated in which the recipient identifies the trouble.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conversation analysis (CA) is an approach to the study of social interaction. At the most basic level, CA seeks to find out patterns in social interaction. Study of conversation helps in discovering the essential shared competencies that make coherent social actions (Mandelbaum, 2005).CA has some basic structures: (a) turn taking organization, (b) sequence organization, (c) repair, and (d) action formation.

The relation between conversations' components and gender was developed by Lakoff (1975) in *Language and Women's Place* and was the start of systematic field of language and gender research. He claimed that men use language to dominate women. Conversation analysis has made an insightful contribution to discussion of gender.

Throne (1979) claimed that teachers tend to make a male-dominated classroom. That's why they make eye contacts more frequently than women. According to Kelly (1988), teachers prefer to interact more with boys than girls. Teachers provide more opportunity for boys to talk by asking them several questions. Francis (2004) cited that boys are more inclined to talking than girls. The finding is consistent with findings of past study done by Chavez (2000) who claimed that teachers use complete sentences to address female students but female students prefer short utterances. Coates (2004) observed more interruptions in male's speech which were indications of competitiveness. On the other hand, women tend to be more cooperative and wait until the current speaker finishes his/her speaking.

Turn taking is one of the key features of interaction. Two systematic organizations for turn taking proposed by Sack et al. (1994) are (a) turn constructional component (b) turn allocational component. Based on turn constructional component, turn taking

occurs at the point defined as Transition Relevance Place (TRP) which is at the completion of Turn Constructional Unit (TCU), that is the first sentence, clause, phrase, or lexical item out of which a turn can be constructed. More recent studies have confirmed that transition relevance places are not fixed at the end of TCUs because of speakers' ability to project the completion of TCUs (Sacks et al., 1974 & Schegloff, 1996). However, Sacks et al. emphasized that interlocutors tend to avoid gaps and overlaps in their conversations.

Moreover they distributed turn allocational techniques into two groups: (a) those in which next turn is allocated by current speaker, (b) those in which a next turn is allocated by self-selection" (p. 12). They also set out some rules for the allocation of turns. First, the transition, relevance place of a turn (a) where the next speaker is selected by the current speaker, the current speaker must stop talking and next speaker must take over, (b) where the next speaker is not selected by the current speaker; any speaker may, but need not, self-selects, with first speaker acquiring rights to a turn, and (c) where the next speaker is not selected by the current speaker, the current speaker may, but need not, continue if no other speaker self-selects. Second, whichever choice has been made, and then a-c comes into operation again.

McHoul (1978) compared L1 classroom interaction to the systematic turn taking principles. He found some deviations from the rules employed in every day conversations. For instance, if the teacher is the current speaker, s/he can nominate the next speaker. The student who is selected by the teacher is obliged to take the next turn. If the teacher has not dominated the next student, no one will take the turn. So, there is no opportunity for self-selection. Paoletti and Fele (2004) find out that some rules of turn taking are not followed in the setting of classrooms. They claimed that teachers try to control the turn taking and avoid overlapping. However, this pattern may not be observed in an everyday conversation.

According to Tainio (2007), McHoul's findings were criticized because his study was only based on instructional talk. He didn't consider other interactions that happened in the classroom. Repair is the name given to periods of talk in which miscommunications rise, are noted and then resolved. Repair plays a fundamental role in maintaining the overall coherence. There are four main types of repair: (a) self-initiated self-completed, (b) self-initiated other-completed, (c) other-initiated self-completed, and (d) other-initiated other-completed. It is crucial to note that there is general preference for self-initiated over other-initiated repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977).

A considerable amount of literature has been published on nature of repair and turn taking in Iran. For example, Yarahmadi and Sadeghi (2012) carried out a study to realize the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' general proficiency and turn taking. Forty participants were selected, their general proficiency test was examined, and based on their scores and were divided into two groups of intermediate and advanced levels. The study showed that advanced learners were more capable of using turn taking rules in their interaction.

Rashidi and Rafiee Rad (2010) claimed that male students were more interested in taking turn than females. Based on his observations, boys tend to answer teachers' questions even if, they didn't know the right answer. In a different study, Rashidi and Naderi (2012) investigated the impact of gender on turn taking. The result showed that male students shared more exchanges with their teacher.

Recently, conversation analysis has been carried out in the classrooms in order to achieve insightful implications about teachers and learners' interaction. Therefore, the primary goal of this study was analyzing turn taking system and repair strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in class rooms through observation. Moreover, this paper attempted to provide more detailed investigations regarding preferred types of repair used by the learners. Therefore, this study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What is the turn-taking system of Iranian male and female EFL learners?
2. What types of repair strategies are preferred among Iranian male and female EFL learners?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study investigated turn taking and repair strategies in both male and female Iranian EFL classrooms. It was done by viewing the videotaped classrooms. It should be noted that all the classes were held normally without the observer's interruption. The participants were 120 Iranian intermediate EFL learners at Gooyesh Language Institute, in Isfahan, Iran, 2016. Ten classes each consisting of 60 females and 60 males were chosen based on their proficiency level. All the participants were at the same level based on the criteria determined by the institute. They were all native speaker of Persian ranging from 17-25 years of age and the average of 21. Therefore, all the students were young adults. It is worthy of mention that the written permission was granted and consent form was signed to prevent any violation of ethical issues and any private information of the participants were kept confidential.

Instruments

In order to accomplish the objectives of the present study, videotaped records of 10 classes were observed. Cameras have already been installed by the Institute, so no interruption was made for the learners and teachers. Additionally, two coding frameworks were chosen as the existing frameworks including Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn taking system and Schegloff's (1977) repair strategies. Figure 1 and 2 illustrate these instruments.
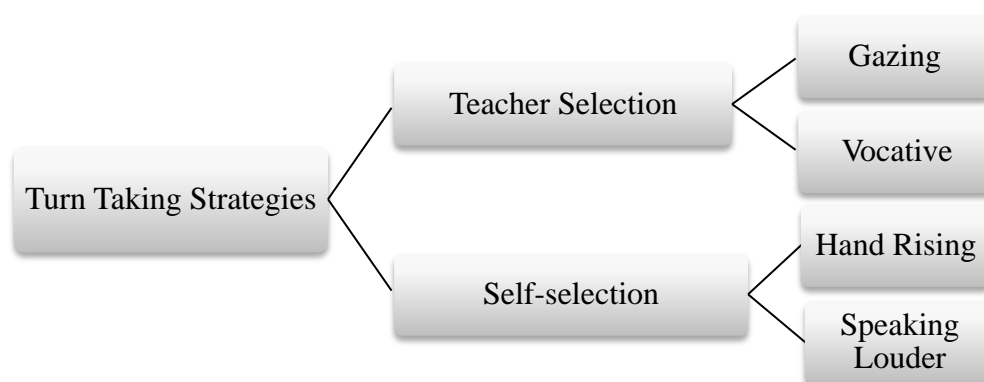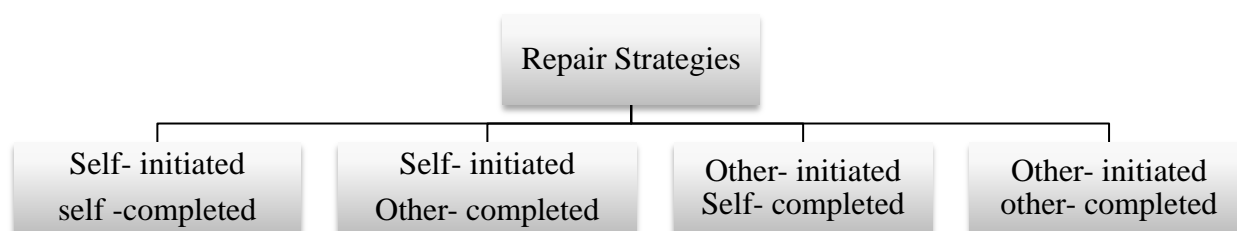
Figure 1. Framework of turn taking

Figure 2. Framework of repair strategies

Data Collection Procedure

Ten Iranian EFL classrooms (five male classes and five female classes) at Gooyesh Language Institute at intermediate levels were selected. All the classes were equipped with a back camera. An authorization was granted to have access to the recorded videotapes on one of the sessions (the 6th session). All the classes were at the same level with the same course book. The recorded CDs provided sufficient audio-visual information about the learners and teachers' interactions. The collected data were observed by the researchers and fit into the frameworks as the instruments. Two observers were worked together to increase validity of the instrument and decrease the subjectivity in the analysis. It should be noted that addressing a specific party, such as gazing or using a vocative were the main criteria to decide whether turn taking was addressed by the teacher or not. Besides, speaking louder or rising hands were signs of self-selection.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 24 was employed. Cross tabulation was used to compare the relationships between the variables. Also, Chi-Square Tests were applied to investigate the distribution of categorical variables

RESULTS

The results of turn taking system among Iranian EFL learners in both male and female classes were counted and listed and the F and Ps were calculated. Then Chi-Square Test

was run to analyze the F of turn taking in 10 classes. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Chi-Square Test on Turn Taking System

Type Of Selection	F	P	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Teacher Selection	196	47.9			
Self-Selection	213	52.1	.707	1	.401
Total	409	100			

As Table 1 shows, 213 self- selections and 196 teacher selections were observed in total number of 409 turn takings, but there was no meaningful difference between self-selection and teacher selection in 10 classes (P> 0.05). In order to find out whether turn taking strategies were different among males and females, Chi-Square Test was employed.

Table 2. Chi-Square Test on Turn taking and Gender

Type of Selection	Female		Male		Total		Chi-Square	df	Sig.
	F	P	F	P	F	P			
Teacher	109	55.6	87	44.4	196	100	10.72	1	.001
Self	84	39.4	129	60.6	213	100			

According to Table 2, there was a meaningful difference between gender and turn taking strategies (P<0.05). The results revealed that female learners had more inclinations to being selected by the teachers, while male students preferred to take the turns autonomously by themselves. Tables 3 and 4 refer to the preferred strategies in self- selection including rising hands and speaking louder, and in teacher selection including gazing and using vocative.

Table 3. Chi-Square Test on Preferred Strategies in Teacher-Selection

Type of Teacher-Selection	Female		Male		Total		Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
	F	P	F	P	F	P			
Gaze	63	57.3	47	42.7	110	100	.280	1	.597
Vocative	46	53.5	40	46.5	86	100			

Table 4. Chi-Square Test on Preferred Strategies in Self-Selection

Type of Self-Selection	Female		Male		Total		Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
	F	P	F	P	F	P			
Hand -Rising	40	42.1	55	57.9	95	100	.511	1	.475
Speak Louder	44	37.3	74	62.7	118	100			

Table 3 and 4 show that there were no significant differences between gender and preferred type of teacher selection and self-selection (P> 0.05). In order to investigate the preferred types of repair strategies in both male and female classes, cross tabulation data and Chi-Square Test were also run. Table 5 shows the findings.

Table 5. Cross Tabulation and Chi-Square Test on Repair Strategies

			Gender		Total	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
			Female	Male				
Repair	Self/Self	F	34	26	60	1.482	3	.686
		P	18.9	16.7	17.9			
	Self/Other	F	41	30	71			
		P	22.8	19.2	21.1			
	Other/Self	F	58	59	117			
		P	32.2	37.8	34.8			
	Other/Other	F	47	41	88			
		P	26.1	26.3	26.2			
Total		F	180	156	336			
		P	100.0	100.0	100.0			

As shown in Table 5, the most preferred repair strategy among male and female learners was other-initiated self-repair. It means that most of the errors were noticed by others including teachers and peers, but correction was made by the learners themselves. According to the table, there was no significant difference between gender and preferred type of repair strategies (P>0.05).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To address the first research question which aimed to investigate the dominant turn taking system among male and female EFL learners, Sacks' (1974) framework was employed. The findings of the study showed that male students employed self-selection more than females. The most striking result to emerge from the data was that turn taking strategies employed by male and female learners were different.

This finding is in line with Francis (2004) that believed that males' turn taking was much more than females'. Moreover, the findings of the study are consistent with Rashidi and Rafiee Rad (2010) who claimed that male students were more likely to have self-selections and interaction even though they were not sure about their answers. However, it is contrary to a study conducted by De Francisco (1991) who found that women have more curiosity to take turn in conversation.

To address the other question which tended to determine a preferred repair strategy among male and female students, obtained data were fit to Schegloff's (1977) coding framework of repair strategies. Analyzing the F of four types of strategies indicated that other initiated self-completed was the most dominant repair strategy. Moreover, the findings showed that there was no meaningful difference between gender and preferred type of repair strategy.

These finding are supported by Svennevig (2004) who claimed that other-initiated repair strategy occurs more frequently. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the study by Fotovatnia (2013) who found that there was no meaningful difference between gender and repair strategies.

All in all, this study showed that there was a meaningful difference among male and female learners regarding turn taking strategies. Males had more preferences to take turns without the involvement of teacher selection. Speaking louder and raising hands were prominent ways of turn taking by males. Although the difference between rising hands and speaking louder was not meaningful, tendency toward speaking louder was more than rising hands among male learners. Moreover, the findings presented that female learners showed great inclinations toward teacher-selection. Gazing and using vocative were observed frequently as signs of teacher-selection. The majority of female students were selected by the teacher through gazing or gesturing rather than using vocative.

The findings also revealed that other-initiated self-completed was the most frequently used repair strategy among the learners. Teachers and peers point out the errors in different ways. For instance, teachers repeated the erroneous sentences with rising intonation and then making the learners to complete their utterances themselves. Furthermore, no significant difference was found among males and females regarding the repair strategies.

The current study adds substantially to our understandings of turn taking system among male and female EFL learners. First, English teachers must be aware of different types of turn taking to analyze their classrooms' context. In Instructors Training Courses (ITC), teachers could be informed that selecting next speaker is not always achieved by teacher-selection. They have to provide some opportunities to let the students take turns themselves autonomously. Moreover, teachers should realize gender differences and try to make females more motivated to talk and take turns even if they are not sure about their responses.

EFL teachers should also consider that other initiated self-completed strategy is not a desirable error correction. Generally speaking, teachers and learners should be taught that how to react when they encounter an erroneous sentence. According to Schegloff (1997), self-initiated self-completed is the best repair strategy.

This study similar to any other study might have some limitations or shortcomings. First, having access to the recorded videotapes of 10 classes was quite cumbersome and also time consuming. Not having access to mixed gender classes was another limitation of the study due to availability. Further investigations and experimentations on turn taking system and repair strategies using mixed gender students and different language settings could be topics for further research.

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