Iranian EFL Classroom Discourse: the Case of Teachers' and Students' Functions in Their Talk and Code-switching

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Abstract

Most of studies on classroom discourse showed that a significant part of learning second language (L2) takes place in the classroom. The present study deals with the notion that L2 learning is a social process based on the zone of proximal development theory of Vygotsky where learning takes place under guidance and assistance (Vygostky, 1978). A teacher can propose a social and linguistic setting in a classroom. The contribution from the teacher and the output from the students can serve as a rich material for acquisition of language. The present study examines the problems of failure of many Iranian students for communicating in English fluently and accurately. To this end, this research investigates the patterns of teacher-student interaction in intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) levels in Safir Language Institute. The examination of classroom talk demonstrates that restricted (one-way) correspondence dominants in the lessons with the teachers driving teacher-fronted talk and students tuning in and then either rehashing after the teacher or reacting quickly. While the students are occupied with discussion, they are asked basically comprehension, consent or instructive (language structure and vocabulary) questions. In addition, an exploration of the teachers' and students' verbal practices demonstrates frequent code-switching usage.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, classroom discourse analysis, code-switching

INTRODUCTION

A large proportion of time is spent in talking and listening in classroom learning and teaching. Talking as a medium of classroom interaction, can play a crucial part in the process of learner development. Internalization of an L2 occurring in the classroom and it has its own features and characteristics. Interaction between the teacher and students and also interaction among students are two of the most important of it features. On the one hand, Formal instruction can increase L2 learning, and on the other hand, it makes possible for L2 learners to achieve higher level of proficiency (Domalewska, 2015). Although L2 learners exposed to rich input in English and learn the language for many

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years, it should not be difficult for Iranian students to communicate in English. Nevertheless, many learners cannot speak and write fluently and accurately in English. Thus, the problem of many students' failure to communicate effectively needs to be confronted. According to Xu (2010), it is of great necessity to give a careful reconsideration of the nature of teacher-student (classroom) interaction. Successful L2 learning depends on classroom communication and interaction of L2 learners with their teacher and other learners. The discourse among students and the teacher and among students themselves is central for L2 learning as it contextualizes learning experiences while active participation in classroom discourse engages learners in the learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the activity of learning new knowledge, many factors may affect the quality of learning, such as: learning styles, learner strategies, different learner variables (motivation, age, and gender) as well as classroom discourse. As Wells (1999), asserts "Being the medium of classroom learning/teaching, language plays a significant role in affecting the kinds of opportunities for knowing and coming to know as well as in encouraging collaborative group work" (p. 114). Conversation analysis (CA) puts forward a novel social respecification of interaction and has its center in the study of sociability as a mundane and orderly accomplishment (Ortega, 2009b). He believed that when this notion applies to L2 problems, this framework characterizes L2 learning as primordially socio-interactional practice and focuses on the analysis of naturally occurring spoken interactions, "whether in casual and intimate conversation, in institutional and public talk, or in the instructional talk of classrooms and tutorials". (p. 227). The talk examination convention to language classroom research grew out of the commitments from claiming Different disciplines. It given an establishment to research to connected applied linguistics and Furthermore language pedagogy. Those first and foremost classroom discourse research about Bellack et al. (1966) is viewed as similarly as a pioneering investigation. This study advertised a basic portrayal about classroom talk directing, including a four-part framework as: 1) structure, 2) solicit, 3) respond, and 4) react (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) at the University of Birmingham carried out another important study which was based on a model for the description of teacher- pupil talk in light of an hierarchically organized framework from claiming ranks toward relationship for Halliday's (Chaudron, 1988) ranked scale methodology. Coulthard (1977) distributed "An introduction to Discourse Analysis" summarizing their theory. They recommended that pedagogical talk at those explanatory levels be recognized as the semantic level of sentential analysis and the social/pedagogical level for programs as well as courses. At the discourse level there are five ranks as: lesson, transaction, exchanges, move, act, each of them develops those components of the higher rank, in line with the hierarchical structure. They discovered in the language for accepted native-speaker school classrooms a design for three-part exchanges: 1) teacher elicitation, 2) learner response, 3) teacher feedback. The idea of language classroom talk has different interpretations. Nunan (1993) concerns classroom discourse as the particular kind of discourse that arises in classrooms. In his

viewpoint, main features of classroom talk involve unequal power associations which need aid denoted toward unequal power chances to teachers and also students to choose topics, take turns in conversation, etc. In Ellis (1990) point of view, classroom discourse has two dimensions: 1) the interactive goal, 2) address. The interactive goal consists of three types as: a) core goals which are ascertained in the distinct pedagogical intentions of the teacher. These goals can be message-centered, medium-centered, or activity-centered; b) Framework goals are characterized as those intelligent objectives related with the structure of classroom activity and c) Social goals happen at the members associate on every day social matters. The second feature of classroom discourse introduced by Ellis is the "address" and its related categories as teacher, pupil, class participant, or group member and with the interactive role they have: speaker, addressee and hearer. Lier (1988) describes classroom discourse according to 1) whether the instructor controls the topic (i.e. what is being talked about) and activity (i.e. the way in which the topic is introduced). Based on this categorization, four fundamental types of classroom interaction are identified. According to him, when neither the topic nor the activity is under the supervision of teacher, the first type of classroom interaction occurs. The second type of communication takes place when the teacher just controls the topic but not the activity. This type of communication entails teachers to transmit a part of information or explaining the subject. Interactions types three involve the control of the teacher for both the topic and the activity. Type four occurs when the teacher controls the activity but not the topic. This type of interaction involves teacher setting up small group work prescribing the rules but giving freedom of choice of topic (Ellis, 1990).

Classroom discourse

Classroom is contrived to be a mini cosmos (Devi, 2015), thus, in this setting the learner considers a member of the society and s/he learns a language in a social context. As a function of teachers is generating environment for acquisition, so the usage of classroom is for 1) acquisition/learning in a formal way and 2) imparting or communicating with the knowledge obtained. Controlling the interactions in the classroom is one of the distinctive properties of classroom discourse. A vast assortment of research demonstrates the unequal functions of members in classroom interaction with the teacher organizing the discussion and turn-taking (Walsh, 2011). However, as Thoms (2012) asserts, the control over the classroom talk prompts restricted learning as there is no place for relevant, spontaneous and natural communication. Students can just obtain the language through attending in interactions and communications framed when they participate in conversation. Language therefore enacted, internalized and turns out to be a part of the students' subjective skills. Savignon (1983) mentioned that:

> "Communicative competency develops gradually by the communicative act in the classroom that goes beyond the knowledge of the linguistic structures, vocabulary and semantic domain" (cited in Devi, 2015).

It should be mentioned that the classroom talk occurs either with pre-designed planning or with no arrangement, unexpectedly. At the point when students confront a

condition to speak and make communication, they attempt to do it with the amount of knowledge they have. Many studies clarify this state as a consequence of lacking the stimulus (Montrul & Slabakova, 2003).

METHOD

As it was stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to scrutinize the Iranian classroom discourse. To reach the goals of this study, a corpus which included three classes was selected from Safir Language Institute in Shahr-e-Kord, Iran. All three teachers were non-native English speakers (Iranian teachers); the collected data in this study included 6 sessions of classroom talk which was two sessions in each.

This study attempted to present and explain the linguistic resources available to in Iranian classroom discourse. In so doing, the study intended to extract and categorize the range of classroom talk which Persian-speaking interlocutors use in English classroom. A framework was needed for the classification of the collected data. The data were collected and categorized as teacher and student talk time, language used in the lesson, the amount of time which was used for Persian and English, and the function of student and teacher talk in the class, this classification has six categories; namely repeating, giving instructions, explanation, translation, praise, and response.

To capture a corpus of this context, the researchers made observations of the class talk which Iranian teachers and students as interlocutors use in class and also record them which has been coordinated with the head of the institute. The data, upon which the study was based, were derived from observation of the recorded spoken discourse in classroom. The sample events together last a total of 7 hours and 24 minutes. The amount of time devoted to writing the tasks is subtracted from this figure.

RESULTS

The preceding part dealt with the overview and elaboration of the methodologies employed to carry out the study. It entailed a description of collected and classified data.
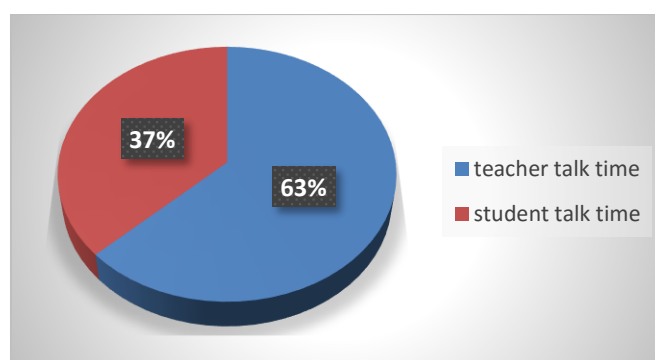

Figure1. Teacher and Student Talk Time

As the collected and categorized data which is shown in the above bar-graph indicates, teacher talk time is more than students talk time in the class.
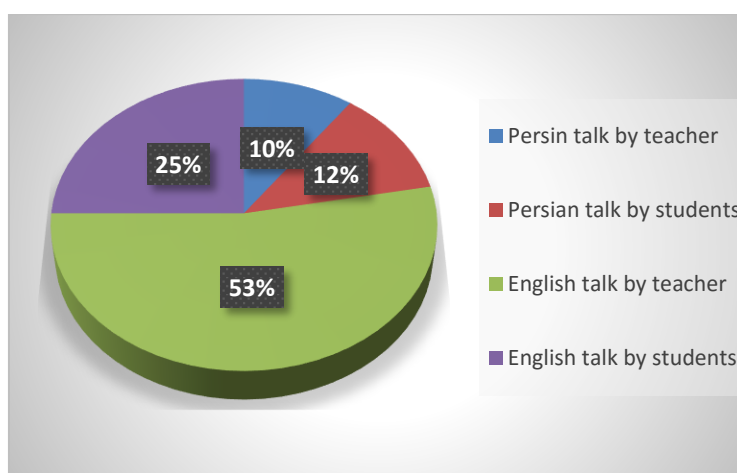
Figure2. Teachers' and Students' code-switching

The amount of time which is spent by teachers to talk in the observed classes was more than students and 53 percent of class is spent with teacher talk in English and 10 percent of the class talk is Persian talk by teacher. On the other hand, out of 37 percent class talk which was the students' turn to talk, 12 percent was in Persian and 25 percent in English.
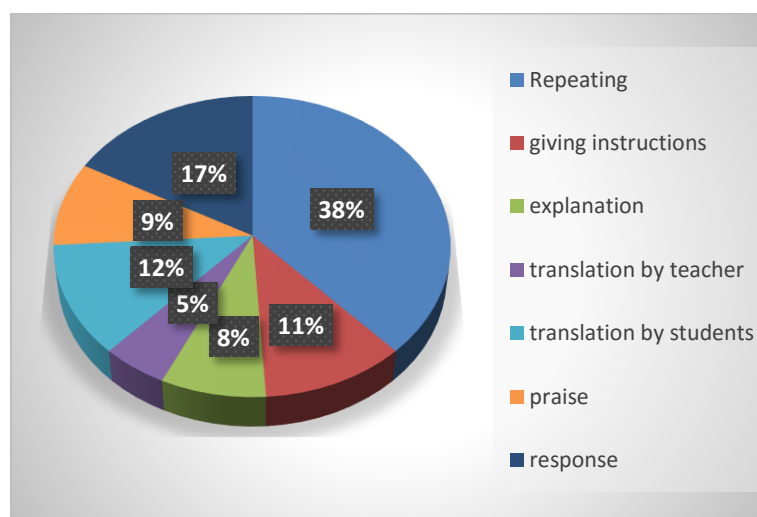
Figure3. Functions Teachers' and Students' Talk

Another classification of the present study which is used to code the data was the function of talk which was used by teachers and students in their classroom discourse. The categorized data is shown in Figure3 and it reveals that out of whole class discourse .38 was repeating, .17 was responses, .17 was translation which out of this time .12 was teacher's translation and .05 was students' translation, .11 was giving instruction, 9 devoted to praise, and .8 was explanations.

What is interesting in this data is that the total time of teacher and students talk in Persian was 22 percent, turning now to the evidence on classification of functions in classroom discourse; the translation time of the class was 17 percent of the class talk. This indicates that Persian talk is used in other functions as well. And the observed

classes showed that for more clarification of some instructions and explanations Persian was used during classes.

DISCUSSION

Previous studies evaluating classroom discourse observed different findings. This study did detect evidence for dominance of teacher in language classroom discourse and it has been revealed that the language classes have a more teacher-centered methods according to the observed data. But having more time to talk for teachers in the class doesn't necessarily indicate a teacher-center approach in the classes. As teachers are trying to distribute the classroom activities between students and manage the time for performing the tasks and this would have been one of the reasons that has led for teachers to use more of class time to talk. Domalewska (2015) discussed that having a large number of students in the class can be a reason for having much time which spent for teacher talk in the language class.

Another striking finding is that both teacher and students used Persian talk as the native language of Iranian EFL learners, beside translation which is used by both teacher and students for more clarification of what is presented in the class or even to ask for how to express something in English-Persian was used by students. These findings are somewhat surprising given the fact that English classes are supposed to use English language, but it is not a weak point of them after all, another research by Domalewska (2015) in Thai language classes also showed the same result, meaning that they also used Thai which is their native language, and in this report the amount of time which is given to native language is even more than what is observed in the present study. But it is still English which is the dominant language which is used in classes. This code-switching is also in accord with a study in Chinese context by Yu (2009) who transcribes data shown code-switching. Another finding of the present study which is in line with the Yu's study is the dominant of teacher in the classroom discourse.

Another finding of the study which is not surprising in Iranian language discourse is the dominant of repeating sentences and words. In other contexts such activities are used for children mostly in kindergartens (Devi, 2015), but in Iranian contexts it is still used for adult EFL learners, and that is the strategy which is mostly used in audiolingual method for teaching a foreign language. It seems that such kind of pedagogical discourse may not end to a sound learning or at least it may not be creative enough.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that teacher talk time dominant the class discourse; besides, the Persian talks as the native language is used during class time and repetition is also practiced as one of the major functions of classroom discourse. This study examined the differences between teacher and student talk along with code-switching and function of classroom discourse. The finding of the present study suggests that the teacher dominance in class is an indication of not having ideal student-centered classes. It is also notable that field dependent learners will benefit from classes which teacher talk is

more than students (Devi, 2015) but students will be less creative and having classes which tend to make students critical thinker might be under question.

The translation and other situations in which Persian has been used for a better comprehension is another fact, Christie (2002) argued that triggering the comprehension can be presented by showing the function in explicit examples provided by teacher. On the other hand, Riegelhaupt (2000) discussed that code-switching can be practiced for two major purposes, one of them is to increase comprehension and this fact is also observed in collected data observation and this is arguable that in classes which students and teachers have the same native language this may happen. Carrasco (1984) also confirmed the same thing noting that lessons occurring in second language may include some code-switching into native language. The second use of code-switching which has mention by Riegelhaupt (2000) is to mark a change in context, teacher also translate the text or ask students to translate in order to feel more confident that students comprehend the content of the lesson.

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