"But let me talk": An Investigation into Teachers' Interaction Patterns in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Drawing on Walsh's (2012) idea that boosting learners' contribution and interaction can play a key role in their foreign language learning, this quantitative/qualitative study tried to cast some light on the ways by which teachers, via their choice and use of language, create or block learners' contribution in direct interactions in the classroom. A total of 800 minutes of recordings from 10 teachers and their learners in EFL classes was studied utilizing a conversation analysis methodology. The interaction patterns identified in the recordings suggest that teachers could manipulate their talk either to facilitate or obstruct learners' involvement by the inserted turns they take. The findings of the study indicate that teachers need to minimize their interventions while the learners take their turns, and instead pave the way for a more interactive discourse. In addition, a 'listening culture' in classrooms should be encouraged in order to create opportunities for more classroom interactive talk. A number of implications for teachers and teacher trainers are also given.

Keywords: prospect creation, prospect blocking, learners' involvement, classroom interaction

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INTRODUCTION

Creating interaction prospects in an EFL classroom is sometimes a complicated task for teachers and even more convoluted for learners (Garton, 2002; Lee, 2006; Ellis, 2008). The chief rationale, possibly, can be related to the fact that ELT specialists have always attempted to contrast the classroom interaction with naturalistic interactions (Skidmore, 2000; Skidmore et al., 2003; Alexander, 2004). Teacher talk in language classes has been criticized by many researchers as being too much time-consuming and deviational (Kim & Suh, 2004; Alexander, 2004; Rezaee & Farahian, 2012; Sadeghi, Jaberi Ansari, & Rahmani, 2015). Even teacher trainers have been requested to lessen the amount of their talk in the pre-service and in-service courses (Li & Walsh, 2011; Louw, Todd, & Jimarkon, 2014). Taken together, the focus has always been on 'how much' the teacher talks rather than 'what' he actually utters. In fact, it is claimed that when teachers talk more, they inadvertently prevent their learners from talking; thus, impeding the process of language learning. This is even more conspicuous and serious in an EFL context, where the chances of having talks in any context except the classroom would be considerably restricted (Paul, 2003).

By looking at a number of studies in the EFL/ESL contexts, one can easily perceive the overemphasis laid on classroom environment as a unique context; a context that is shaped by its participants, i.e. learners and teachers (van Lier, 1988; Johnson, 1995; Seedhouse, 1996; Behnam & Pouriran, 2009; Sadeghi et al., 2015). Bearing that in mind, a promising learner-centered foreign language classroom, consequently, ought to offer a context within which learners can play a part in learning practices and boost their language use (van Lier, 2001). However, as Walsh (2002) puts it, there is little doubt that, like any type of academic environment, being a member of an EFL classroom comes with its own set of restrictions: a) teachers are the chief speakers in the classroom, b) they often choose who starts and finishes a turn, c) the procedure of a lesson is put forward mostly by teachers, d) the course content is generally chosen based on teachers' syllabi, e) most questions are posed by teachers, and f) teachers are responsible for modifying their level of knowledge to that of learners.

All these existing features, as part of the reality, inhibit participants' choice of verbal behavior in any EFL classroom. Overlooking the live talk

taking place in the class might lead teachers to forget about the quality of what they say, pushing on learners, unconsciously, toward being more silent. Therefore, a careful analysis of what practically comes up in EFL classes during teachers' and learners' interaction, using a Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology, is the main rationale behind doing the current study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher talk is defined as "a variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching. In trying to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 588). Parrish (2004) believes teacher talk may manifest itself in a range of manners like warm-up chats, direct instruction, giving directions, giving feedback, making transitions, and comprehension checks. He points out all these interactions are suitable in an EFL/ESL class only if they make use of the language that is understood by learners (Parrish, 2004). Additionally, considering any EFL classroom a unique social context, any endeavor to figure out the essence of classroom interactions has to deal with the issue of effectiveness rather than amount (Widdowson, 2003).

That is why one may find a considerable body of research in the literature emphasizing the linkage between interaction, input, output and the necessity of meaning negotiation to enhance learners' involvement and creating opportunities for learners' participation. In this respect, several scholars (e.g. Long, 1983, 1996; Swain, 1985, 1995; Pica, 1994; Santopietro Weddel, 2008, Tuan & Kim Nhu, 2010, Hurst, Wallace, & Nixon, 2013) have given detailed theoretical expositions on the role of interaction and output in classrooms as well as naturalistic settings. Some studies, however, were narrow in their quest, focusing only on question types as major means of classroom interaction. For instance, Behnam and Pouriran (2009) investigated recurrent patterns of questioning and their interactive impacts, where the findings indicated display questions were the most common question types used by teachers, and referential questions could not give rise to sufficient amount of interaction. In a similar vein, Arizavi, Rezaee Kalhor, Mousavi, and Namdari (2015)

carried out a study aiming at finding out what effects teacher questioning would have on classroom interaction. The findings of this mixed-methods study disclosed the fact that questioning types do not guarantee elicitation of responses. On the other hand, there are other studies that took a broader gamut in their quest for the effect of teacher talk on learners' interaction. By way of illustration, we can discuss Walsh's (2002) study in which he took one step further than Behnam and Pouriran (2009) and Arizavi et al. (2015) by not only considering the facilitative role of teacher questioning types, but also exploring the obstructive side effect of teachers' interventions.

To refer back to Widdowson (2003), what matters in classroom interaction is not the amount of talk, but it is the effectiveness of that talk. In the studies reviewed, except for Walsh (2002) and Arizavi et al. (2015), a critical reading would easily reveal that most of the literature was concerned with the quantity of the interaction and little attention was paid to the patterns involved in promoting or discouraging learners' participation. Considering the status quo, i.e. the obscure nature of the connection between meaning negotiation and learners' chance of effective interaction, the mere existence of such a position could be a positive sign to focus even more on the ties between teacher language and learning prospects. As Walsh (2002), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), Hougham (2015), and Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt (2017) put it, the reasonable add-on to the current findings would be to instruct teachers to inspire learners to clarify themselves, encourage learners to make use of learning prospects, enhance the classroom atmosphere for learners' self-expression, promote learners' classroom involvement, cater for interactional modifications, and finally facilitate turn-taking. However, Musumeci (1996, p. 314) has warned teachers not to go to extremes to help smoothen the learners' talk since the counter-product would be a blockage to autonomous talk. He explicitly holds, "teachers… speak more, more often, control the topic of conversation, rarely ask questions for which they do not have answers, and appear to understand absolutely everything the learners say, sometimes before they even say it!" In fact, continuous teacher talk does not support learners' communication skills. To draw on Bolitho (2006) and Skinner (2017), there seems to be a necessity for a balance here: a few minutes of talk with appropriate quality on a topic that

sincerely motivates learners might be more useful than hours of teachers'
interrupting learners.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Having reviewed the related studies with regard to the effect of teacher talk
on the learners' performance, a clear niche can be detected. In most of the
reviewed studies, the quality of teacher talk in relation to the opportunities
for learners' participation has gone unnoticed, if it received any attention.
Accordingly, a precise study to see how teachers' interaction patterns tend
to be blocking or facilitative of the learning opportunities helps orientate
both teachers and learners toward making more interactive prospects.
Given all this, the following research questions are formulated:

1. In what ways can EFL teachers create learning prospects via their
choice of language?

2. To what extent teachers' interactions increase/decrease the learning
prospects?

METHOD
Conceptual Framework
An important consideration in analyzing classroom interaction is the social
nature of classroom patterns (van Lier, 1988; Prabhu, 1992; Johnson,
1995; Seedhouse, 1996; Cazden & Beck, 2003; Kovalainen, 2013) in
which participants' interactions are manifested in turn-taking, sequencing
of acts, topic nomination/change/terminations, etc. Blanchette (2009)
signifies the structured nature of the classroom by reflecting on the
operative rules that guarantee the maintenance of talk and its stability for
participants which could be explained by a CA-based approach. van Lier
(1988) had already postulated that such an approach could be an adequate
design for investigating classroom discourse. Basing our work on typical
forms of social practices, with all their features, and paying heed to the
interwoven turns led to a study with a CA-based methodology.

To elaborate on the adopted theoretical framework, a number of issues
like situated discourse roles, turn-taking fashions, units of analysis,
facilitative and obstructive interactions, and the degree and depth of the
interpretations should be brought to the fore. As it has already been

depicted, a language classroom is a context where interactional exchanges overweigh transactions in which one participant (or likely more) acts as a conveyor of knowledge and the other participant(s) largely function as recipients of knowledge. This knowledge transmission (in the form of information exchange or pedagogical instruction) takes place through turns, from a discourse perspective. The word 'turn', as used in this study, refers to the linguistic realization of actions rather than to the action(s) performed by these words (Levinson, 2013). Here, 'turn' is equal to 'utterance' which neutrally refers to everything that is said by one speaker until he/she stops talking; however, 'turn' refers to the positioning of a stretch of talk by one speaker with respect to other stretches of talk by other speakers (Levinson, 2013). Consider the following example from the data of this study:

> Turn 3625 (Teacher): =Aha (2)
> Turn 3626 (Learner): =What I mean is that even though you are not conscious or whatever perhaps you can understand what is happening?

As demonstrated in the example, turns could be verbal and less often non-verbal behaviors (e.g. when using body language to convey a message; this is not of much concern for the current study). They either can be as short as a single word like an interjection and backchanneling, or a bulky utterance as long as an entire speech. What follows are the linguistic realizations of teachers' turns that have emerged out of our data which are broadly divided as blocking and facilitative interactions followed by their subdivisions:

Teachers' facilitative interaction is defined as an act that does not impede the learners from completing their turns and they would also give rise to modifications and probably a follow-up uptake from the learners. They include the following:

a) Short explicit error correction: Drawing the learners' attention to the errors they make by giving short hints without explaining the problem and giving explicit solutions;

b) Feedback on content: Giving feedback on the message not form;

c) Confirmation check: Asking the learner if he/she means something by an utterance they produce;

d) Prolonged wait-time: Allowing sufficient time (several seconds) for learners to respond or formulate a response (Walsh, 2006);

e) Scaffolding: Reformulating or extending a learner's contribution, and providing an example for learners (Walsh, 2006);

f) Backchanneling: Verbal signs (like uh-huh, yeah, OK, and I see), non-verbal signs (like nodding), and a combination of both to indicate a listener is following the speaker, allowing him/her to continue their talk; and,

g) Display questions: The answer to these questions does not require induction or deduction reasoning.

Blocking interaction is defined as an act that hampers learner's involvement and limits or impedes learning potential. It is manifested by the following:

a) Teachers' turn completion of learners: it is when the teacher indicates that he/she intends to complete or finish a turn for a learner by raising intonation, overlapping his turn onto the learners' turns, and/or interruptions;

b) Teacher echo:
   1. Teacher repeats teacher's previous utterance.
   2. Teacher repeats a learner's contribution. (Walsh, 2006),

c) Extended Initiation-Response-Follow-up (IRF): it is used in traditional teacher fronted classrooms and depends on the teacher initiation, learner response and teacher follow-up (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992); and,

d) Referential questions: these types of questions require a type of answer that is known only by the person who answers the question and draw on inductive/deductive reasoning skill.

Participants

A purposive sample of ten male institute EFL teachers, with four to eight years of experience, was selected from Iran Language Institute (ILI) of Ahvaz, Iran. All these teachers hold a degree in English (six M.A. holders of TEFL, three M.A. holders of English Literature, and one Ph.D. candidate in TEFL). At the time of the study, the teachers had a pre-intermediate class or two, which made the sampling of the classes a

convenient one. These teachers were asked to record their pre-intermediate classes for two 40-minute sessions, using their own cellphones. The eavesdropping technique was used in order to ward off any intrusive Hawthorne effect. The sole principle was to record those parts that include teacher-fronted activities followed by teacher-learner exchanges. The learners knew they were being recorded; however, they were not debriefed about the purpose of the study. To prevent any biased sampling of the data, the researchers took a number of measures. They first briefed the participant teachers what teacher-fronted activities are, and then asked them to record special sections of the textbook which is, to a large extent, compatible with the activities that lend themselves to pro-longed interactions. This brought up a sum of 800 minutes of recordings to be later transcribed and analyzed by the researchers. Needless to say, the analysis of the recordings and the roundtable discussions of the researchers would resolve any case of ambiguities. Furthermore, when disagreements could not be compromised by the researchers, the participant teachers were summoned by the researchers and retrospective accounts were sought.

Data Collection Procedure
The data were analyzed using van Lier's (1988) and Johnson's (1995) broad description model. These models were exploited because they would illustrate not only the content of the conversations and exchanges, but also reflect on the way teachers use language to manipulate the structure and content of classroom activities. The collected data helped the researchers to figure out that some of the teachers of the study, deliberately or not, are constantly in the process of generating prospects for their learners to talk. This was mostly due to the fact that learners' language use and learning come hand in hand. The authors of the present study analyzed three lengthy excerpts independently. These samples served as representatives of the entire corpus. It is important to note that the findings reported in this study are not restricted only to the patterns emerging from the representative excerpts. In addition, brief excerpts were only used for explanatory goals to support the main argument of the study. The point is not to assess the teachers' pedagogical skills, but to analyze the contrasts between facilitating and blocking learning prospects. As the authors analyzed the corpus independently, cases of incongruity might ensue.

Therefore, 100 minutes of the recordings along with their transcriptions were analyzed and compared in a face-to-face session. The transcriptions and their interpretations were subjected to Cronbach's inter-coder reliability. A satisfactory index of .72 was obtained. To guard against any misinterpretation of the corpus, the same 100-minute sample was given to a university professor well-informed about CA analyses. Juxtaposing this professor's interpretations with those of the authors indicated a significant analogy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was an endeavor to delve into the ways by which teachers employ language to maximize or minimize learners' contribution in direct interactions in the classroom. Analyzing the corpus, the researchers came up with a number of interaction patterns which were used to answer the research questions. The first research question of this study revolved around the ways by which EFL teachers create learning prospects through language. To answer this question, all teachers' language use that would encourage learners to have participation in classroom interaction, ranging from a single word confirmatory utterance to a long stretch, were detected, analyzed and two broad categories were proposed. The first category, labeled as creation, was found to account for the instances when teachers increased learning prospects. This category contains a number of strategies, explained in section 3.1. What follows is an account of this first category.

Creating Learning Prospects

In the first excerpt, it can be obviously observed that the teacher, using controlled language, linking linguistic and educational objectives, and not interrupting the learners even if they have long pauses, simplifies and encourages restatement and illumination. This type of teacher's verbal behavior, as observed in this study, lends support to the association between pedagogical discourse and learning opportunities which were herald by Walsh (2002) and Sadeghi et al. (2015).

Excerpt 1 (see Appendix for the transcription system)
In this excerpt, the instructor deals with practicing oral fluency. There are

13 pre-intermediate adult learners from Ahvaz, Iran, and the course content is Pre-intermediate 1, the assigned book of the institute.

Teacher	Learner(s)
1322	L: the truth is my brother who live in Kuwait give eh…
1323 GAVE=	
1324	L: =gave gave gift card to me=
1325 =wow very nice . . .	
1326	L: but sad news [is]
1327 [the sad] news is . . .	
1328	L: I don't know number . . .
1329	LL: /number/number/ (2)
1330	L: pink code=
1331 =pin code . . .	
1332	L: sorry?=
1333 =pin code pin code=	
1334	LL: =/ehh pink code/pink code/=
1335 =PIN CODE not pink code=	
1336	LL: =/pin/pin code/p-i-n/=
1337	L: =I usually don't remember it
1338	L: =ah pin code=
1339 = I rarely memorize my pin code, what about you?	
1340	L: not me, not me ((2)) he can telephone you
1341 =he can . . .	
1342	L: he can say [you]

1343 [he can] . . .

1344   L: he can tell you your pin code

1345 yes he can

1346   L: [he can tell you] this pin code by cell phone

1347   L: but calling him is hard because um because um the time um=

1348   L:=the time difference?

1349   L: =time difference=

1350   L: count your time how many hours are different in 2 countries? (3)

1351   L: three or four=

1352   L: = four hours time difference right? call him in morning and it's afternoon there=

1353   L: =same in Jordan=

1354   L: =I call him at home but it's um

1355 =is it the same four hours?=   [yeah] I think we have same time difference

1356   L: [midnight] . . .

1357   L: well call him in noon((3))=

1358 =AT

1359   L:ok I phone him at eleven at twelve

(Teacher 3 classroom data, 2018)

In the following, the teacher's use of language that lubricates learners'

participation and builds on their possibilities for learning is analyzed.

a) Short explicit error correction (turns 1327, 1335, 1358)

As it is clearly seen, to deal with the errors, the teacher chose a direct approach of error correction. The main rationale could be maximum economy of this approach which is even proven to be preferable on the side of the learners (Seedhouse, 1997). One can even argue that due to its time-saving and less interfering nature, explicit error correction, when the time is right, is preferred when compared with other time-consuming techniques the teachers take. This is in conjunction with what Widdowson (2003) calls effectiveness of interaction, and it is achieved through ease of comprehension on the side of the learners and conciseness of the correction on the part of the teachers.

b) Feedback on content (turns 1335, 1339)

The teacher corrected the learners' mispronunciation, as in turn 1335, perceiving it initially as a learners' lack of knowledge of the word, then aimed to provide the learner with a content word. A few turns later, the teacher, rather adequately, offers his own experience to help the learner mend the erroneous utterance, as in turn 1339. Appropriate choice of feedback and directing its point toward the message, rather than form, brings about authentic communication. The one that is acceptable in the context delineated here. The appropriate use of feedback type for the right learner in the right time is a sensible decision that teachers have to make within milliseconds. This is in line with the proposition put forth by Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) about offering the right feedback to learners and making sure learners notice there is a problem with their message not the form.

c) Confirmation check (turn 1355)

Teachers continually pursue illumination, check for confirmation, and warmly welcome the first involvement of a learner, tend to capitalize on learners' learning potential. In Excerpt 1, the teacher's example of confirmation check not only does leave open the channel, but also keeps the flow of the talk as a 'bridge-the-gap' tool. As Musumeci (1996) put it, checking for confirmation and asking for illumination need to be done fully from teachers to learners, and more significantly from learners to teachers. The firmly-established findings in the literature regarding the

negotiation of meaning in an L2 classroom are clear evidence for the observation of this study (cf. Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987).

d) Prolonged wait-time (turns 1346-1354)

Turn-taking organization is among the salient features of Excerpt 1. As the talk goes on, the teacher hands around the turns to learners while he gradually stays off. The learners, able to cope with their turns effectively, manage the talk without the teacher's involvement. Many teachers may find silence menacing, an indication of defect demonstrating that they are not doing their duty appropriately. In reality, the opposite is true in academic contexts like the one in this study where the prescribed goal is to focus on oral fluency. Prolonged wait-time, based on Walsh (2006), in which learners are allowed to answer their teachers' questions, is of dual functions. Firstly, it maximizes learners' utterances, turns and responses. Secondly, by giving more elaborate answers, learners get involved in more interactional patterns. Like Bolitho (2006), this finding confirms the point that teachers need to be there not only to act as the gap fillers but also as agents to simplify a sound and ongoing discourse.

e) Scaffolding (turns 1331, 1333, 1339)

It is completely natural that the communications in the context of L2 classroom face breakdowns. It usually happens when learners are not equipped with communicative strategies, forget the use of appropriate structures or cannot remember specific words or chunks. Here comes the pivotal role of the teacher to butt in and make up for the missing language and stop the conversation failure. As some teachers may intervene too early or too late, choosing the best time and being sensitive to learners' demands is of significant importance. The fact is, scaffolding, due to its supporting nature, provides more than just correcting errors. This supporting role of the teacher requires using the language economically and listening to the ongoing interactions eagerly and actively. To be more specific, we can mention latched modeling (in turns 1331 and 1333), in which the teacher immediately utters the words, or alternative phrasing (in turn 1339). By way of analogy, our findings are in accord with Santopietro Weddel's (2008) study in that the role of interaction and output in classroom setting is seen as a platform for staged (or scaffolded) improvement on the verbal behavior of the learners.

f) *Backchanneling (turn 1325)*

As in turn 1325, a verbal sign 'wow' can insinuate to the learners that their interlocutor is following them actively; therefore, they would be encouraged to provide a follow-up discourse, giving more details of what they have already said. Turn 1326 clearly proves our claim that offering backchanneling or backchannels can have an effective facilitative role in discourse. Contrary to Walsh (2002, 2006) and Li and Walsh (2011), who have not assigned any role to this category, we place much emphasis on using this strategy to help improve learners' active participation in class talk. The other categories of backchanneling, as stated earlier, include non-verbal signs (like nodding), and a combination of both verbal and non-verbal signs. No instance of these latter categories was found in the analysis of the corpus.

g) *Display questions (1355)*

Display questions do not require learners to ponder over an epistemic answer. It can function as an apparatus to invite the learner to give a simple straightforward answer and take the lead to continue his turn. This is illustrated in turn 1355 when the learner immediately and effortlessly uttered his answer to the question the teacher asked. We have to add this strategy to Parrish's (2004) list of actions that would motivate learners' interaction. In addition, Li and Walsh (2011) have shown that this is a plausible way to induce learners' interaction or participation in the classroom.

Out of a sum of 38 turns in Excerpt 1 (26 made by learners, 12 by the teacher), 11 teachers' intentional and unintentional involvements were successful both in encouraging lengthy complicated turns and engaging learners. His utterances let learners generate natural complete replies and be active participants of the discourse. The teacher tries not to lessen the degree of seriousness, prevent the flow of the discourse and block learners' replies by his inappropriate 'plug-the-gap' techniques. He only comes in when it is urgent to support correct errors and add some flavor to the class discussion with his personal comments. In Excerpt 1, learners self-select (1346-1354), overlap (1355) and latch (when they immediately follow each other, like 1336, 1337, and 1338).

Blocking Learning Prospects

A specific context, in which the use of language and educational objective hardly correspond, is presented in the discussion following this excerpt:

Excerpt 2

Teacher	Learner(s)
701 what happens in Iran if you park your vehicle unlawfully?	
702	L: ehh . . . two things might happen
703 two [things]	
704	L: [one] is emm I park it ((1)) and
705 yes . . . if I park . . . my vehicle . . . unlawfully; again Ali	
706 [unlawfully]	L: if I park my vehicle
707 [unlawfully]	
708	L: the police officer come and give me
709 COMES and GIVES me	
710	L: gives me? A small piece of paper that I can't pay **(laughter)**
711 we call it a TICKET. Is it true?	
712	L: or if my vehicle parked
713 my vehicle is parked	
714	L: if my vehicle is unlawfully parked . . the police officer take my vehicle and . . umm . . . go to the police department no not police department

it is a huge area
where they have some
[vehicles] they

715 [yes where] they gather the vehicles=
716   L: =gather the vehicles
                                                       . . . and if I have many
                                                       of them

717 tickets
718   L: tickets
719 yes
720   L: umm I'm not sure . .
                                                       . because . . . no . . .
                                                       because no (1) umm if
                                                       I have for instance 50
                                                       [tickets] and I have
                                                       some cash in my
                                                       account the
                                                       government get the
                                                       money [from my
                                                       account] with no
                                                       consult

721 [tickets; good]
722 [from your account]
723 no confirmation?
724   L: no no conSULT . . .
                                                       me **(laughter)**=

725 =and how do they know you
Have money in your account?
726   L: asking me?
727 yes how do the police know?
728   L: no but THEY know
729 you mean the government?
730   L: yes and they come
                                                       to take [that((1))]

731 the government takes the money
 . . . from your bank account? Oh

my God . . . that's very bad . . . and
how many **TICKETS** do you have?

732	L: [me? No]

733 No I mean how many tickets you
Need to pay? Is there a number?

734	L: no ((2))

735 there is not a number? Did anyone
In this class understand a thing?

736	L: no
737	LL: **(laughter)**

738 Can you say again what you mean Ali?

(Teacher 2 classroom data, 2018)

Based on the analysis of the corpus, with an illustration form Excerpt 2, the following blocking patterns emerged.

a)   *Teachers' turn completion of learners (turns 713, 715, 717, 721, 722, 725, 727)*

The teacher is trying to fill the gaps, and that can be easily seen by numerous instances of latching in Excerpt 2. Several uses of (=) and the turns that come one after another draw on the effort to promote the discussion. There might be other learners waiting for their turns or the teacher may be in a rush to finish that specific section of the unit; these two can be justifying reasons for him to skip some crucial steps in the class and among his learners. One may call it 'feeding the learners' instead of giving them more opportunity to develop their talk.

A significant difference can be brought to light by comparing 'scaffolding' and 'finishing learners' turns'. While the former deals with the linguistic support, the latter deals with the prediction of what your interlocutor wants to say and the completion of his turn. The unfavorable effects of this intrusion are the restriction of the occurrence and eminence of learner involvement. Another pattern whereby the learners' turns are brought to a halt is when teachers interrupt to clarify points or give someone else a chance for talk. This would result in a break down in the flow of the discourse. As shown in turn 724-725, the teacher's interference has blocked the learner 'mid-flow' (after 'me') that unintentionally ended in a breakdown (726) and resulted in the loss of what he was trying to utter.

If the teacher had just hung around for some more seconds and let the learner finish his turn, the learner could have had the chance to generate more amount of complicated language. Had the teacher simply postponed his question for a while, he might have increased the chances of learning and intensified interactions. Let us compare turns 701-723 in Excerpt 2 with what follows in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3

Teacher	Learner(s)
3624	L: =ahh when someone dies and when a you hear that sad news ((2)) the last thing comes to mind is ((4)) his face=
3625 =aha (2)	
3626	L: = what I mean is that even though you are not conscious or whatever perhaps you can understand what is happening (2)
3627	L: but it takes time ((2))=
3628	LL: /yes/takes time ((2))/=
3629	L: = I think if you have many experiences ((3)) I mean if you see so many dead people in your job or in your life maybe maybe it's easy for you to understand what's happening=

3630	L: =yeah=
3631	L: but no . . .
3632	L: but I think that is a very difficult job. Why should you do it? Why do you ((3)) need to do a bad job? It's just your choice=
3633 =alright=	
3634	L: =true=
3635	L: you can have a better job but most of the times people go and do a hard job because they can't do any other job ((4)) they start and continue you know=
3636 = maybe a family job, ha? =	
3637	L: = yes yes they do their father's job
3638	L: even if he's a garbage man **(laughter)**
3639	L: that's a job . . .
3640	L: nobody said that's not . . .
3641	L: I know but we have to respect it=
3642	L:= I respect it=
3643	L:=all I say is that you have to like what you do=
3644=and does it hurt you?=	
3645	L: =pardon?=

3646 =does it hurt you if I do the thing
you don't like?=
3647   L: =umm yes it's your
                                                         job you know you have
                                                         to like what you do=

3648 =you are right. I feel sorry, too.
3649   L: yeah?=
3650=yes=

                                   (Teacher 6 classroom data, 2018)

What is tangibly observable in Excerpt 3 is a huge amount of learner-learner interaction, little amount of the teacher's unnecessary interruption and a talk with lots of prospects for negotiation of meaning. But how does the teacher play his role? He is more like a mediator, a coordinator of the talk, trying to lead the class and keep the talk channels open (turns 3625, 3633). Well, there are interruptions but with their own specific goals. They are projected to elucidate meaning or go through the intention of the speaker (turns 3636, 3644, 3646).

b)   *Teacher echo (turns 703, 707, , 721, 722)*
Teacher echo gives prominence to the augmentation of a learner's involvement, in order to let all the other learners hear it. It is unfortunate that this characteristic of classroom discourse may interrupt or even impede the flow of the interaction like that of turn 721 and immediately 722 in which the teacher repeats the learners' utterance indicating the completion of the turn. What is of crucial importance for teachers is to figure out why, when and how to utilize 'echo' and to minimize using it if they want to have its maximum function. From one side and due to misusing teacher echo, the teacher and one of the learners, in Excerpt 2, are the only participants in the classroom talk, while the rest of the class is totally passive. From the other side, learner-learner interactions are more noticeable in Excerpt 3, where there is not any teacher echo.

c)   *Extended Initiation-Response-Follow-up (turns 3646-3650)*
This pattern sometimes begins with a pre-emptive initiation of the teacher and pushes learners to say something which is then followed by teachers' evaluation of the response or a form of feedback. As a typical teaching interchange, the turn-taking IRF model can be considered valuable in

certain classroom contexts. Yet, teachers need to refrain from adopting it as a prevailing discourse pattern in EFL contexts owing to its limiting and minimizing nature. This is confirmed by Walsh (2002), who maintains that there exists a disharmony between the use of language and the educational objective a teacher has in mind. Not deliberately, this leads to the restricted involvement of learners. It is believed by thoughtful use of silence, less use of teacher echo and standing against unnecessary interference, interactional opportunities and learning situations might be expanded.

d)   Referential questions (turns 701)

These questions are arduous by nature because they put a lot of demands on learners to draw on their world knowledge as well as linguistic repertoire to give a genuine response. The analysis of the corpus revealed that in most occurrences of these types of questions learners were not able to give a long answer, hence, a long turn. This can be readily seen in turn 701 when the teacher asked what the punishment for unlawful car park in Iran is. This implies that referential questions can be potentially blocking, rather than interaction motivators, despite the commonsense of educators who believe in the facilitating role of these questions. Shamsipour and Allami (2012) have reported similar findings in this regard. However, they concluded that the use of referential questions in classrooms should be adjusted to the learners' level of proficiency.

To answer the second question concerning the extent to which interaction patterns employed by teachers can increase or decrease learners' contributions, all the creating and blocking prospect patterns, along with their frequencies and percentages indicating their success or failure are tabulated as follows. As Table 1 shows, a total of 517 teachers' turns of creating and blocking interaction patterns were identified in the corpus (284 creating prospects and 233 blocking prospects). As the frequency counts show, the creating turns outnumbered the blocking ones proportionally.

Table 1: Success and failure of teacher interaction patterns
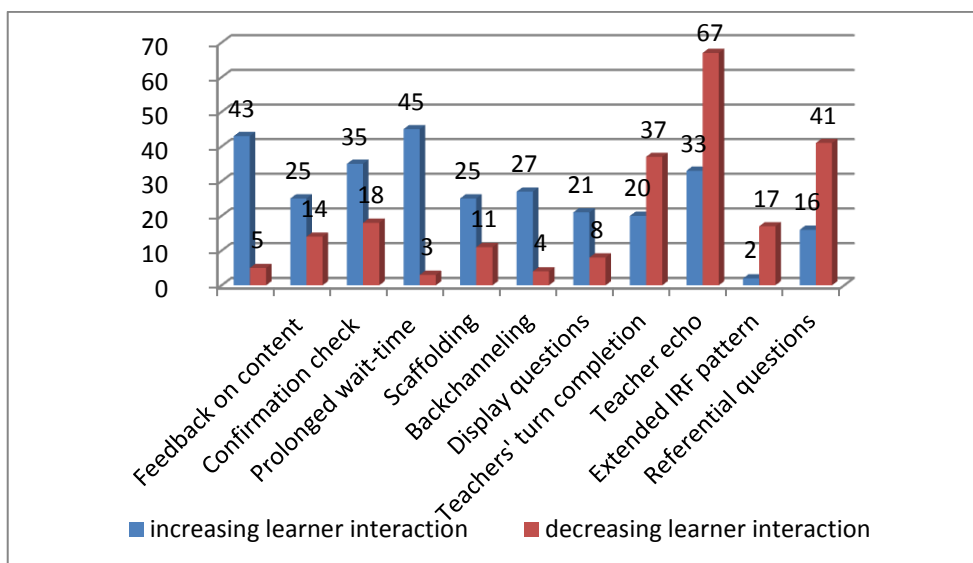
Looking at the teachers' creating interaction patterns, it can be seen that confirmation checks (18.6%), prolonged wait-times (16.9%) and short explicit error corrections (16.9%) were the most frequent types, while the other patterns were roughly equal in number and were remarkably lower than that of prolonged wait-time and short explicit error correction. When it comes to effectiveness issue, as defined by the words 'increasing' and 'decreasing' in the research question, prolonged wait-time and short explicit error correction were the most successful patterns. On the other hand, those interaction patters that block or discourage learners' active participation would obviously have more failures, as Table 1 illustrates. Teacher echoes (42.9%), referential questions (24.4%), and teachers' turn completion (24.4%) stand at the top of this category, followed by extended IRF patterns. Reflecting on the failure of these interaction, teacher echo and referential question patterns were the most blocking patterns.

It is worth mentioning that the raw frequency counts of the patterns in this study performed dual functions. To be more specific, an instance of interaction might create a prospect for the learner to have a long turn, while the same interaction might have a blocking function in another exchange. Therefore, the instances were not independent and would not lend themselves to further inferential statistics like the Chi-square test to

detect the location and size of the differences.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was undertaken to discern the nature of 'teacher-learner talk' and 'learner-learner talk' taking place in the Iranian EFL classes. The findings indicate that the teacher needs to diminish the blocking of his/her verbal behavior and pave the way for a more interactive discourse. In doing so, teachers need to value every second of the talk, listen to what learners say and how they say it, do not be afraid of being silent and try to keep the pace of the talk going. Except these, the quality of what is stated in the classroom talks have to be examined rather than a mere focus on what comes up every moment in EFL classes (Widdowson, 2003). Additionally, in order to create prospects for more talk, teachers need to encourage a 'listening culture' in the classrooms; a culture via which learners obtain the ability to be good listeners of the others' talks and teachers themselves stop butting in for unnecessary corrections and evaluations. There are cases in which providing learners with an alternative or a well-known metalinguistic feedback or even recast would be the best choice of the teachers. Drawing on questioning techniques and as it could be seen in the excerpts, teachers can often times ask challenging but simple questions (most probably display questions) within the talks of the learners that would keep the talk lively (Li & Walsh, 2011; Shamsipour & Allami, 2012; Arizavi et al., 2015). Consequently, teachers' long and redundant explanations, paraphrases and sentence completions would seem harmful to the flow of the class talk. While teachers have silence and prolonged wait time as means at hand, there would be no need to fill all the gaps of the learners' talks (Bolitho, 2006). After all teachers are there, inside the classes, to plan and build meaningful real-world tasks, promote productive talks and hype learners up to come across their own voice in English (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Parrish, 2004).

A number of implications can be drawn from the findings that can add to the existing literature. Firstly, the quality of teacher talk should be viewed as the criterion for the effectiveness of the interaction. Bearing in mind the close link between the use of language and educational objectives, teachers could be made cognizant of the necessity to utilize language fitting their teaching objectives. Secondly, teachers should adapt their roles from one phase of the class to another and do not act like preprogrammed 'robots'.

One of these roles that has not attracted much attention is the 'the gap filler' role, which is what teachers are recommended to be careful with in the discourse of the EFL classroom. By filling all the gaps, teachers may generate a smooth-flowing interchange, but diminish the chances for interaction and learning opportunities. Still, another implication is the inclusion of materials containing issues for teachers on how to exploit interaction patterns to ameliorate classroom active participation and inform teachers of those impeding practices that end up in interaction breakdowns. A further implication is that, unlike Walsh (2002, 2006), Shamsipour and Allami (2012), who consider the teachers' interaction patterns as absolute variables resulting in either constructing or obstructing the learners' interaction, our findings shed light on the fact that it is advisable to take these patterns as relative variables. This means that teachers should perceive these patterns as context-dependent.

This study does not claim to be all-inclusive due to a set of uncontrolled, unintended variables. There is little doubt that factors like learners' nationalities, gender, age and learning styles as well as teachers' preferred methods, teaching styles and the content they introduce play their parts in shaping the classroom discourse. The authors acknowledge the effect of these factors might limit the findings to its local, situational context, and they cannot be generalized to other contexts unless viewed as tentative suggestions. For the most part, 800 minutes of classroom talk does not suffice for a comprehensive generalization of the findings. A second limitation is the technique employed to collect the data. Although the researchers did their best to prevent Hawthorne effect of eavesdropping (recording their voices by teachers' cell phones), the mere fact of being recorded might have some bearings on the way teachers interact in the classroom. Another limitation relates to the several cases of overlapping turns that would make it quite impossible for the researchers to transcribe the entire interactions properly (13 minutes of overlapping inaudible turns).

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Appendix

Transcription System (based on van Lier, 1988; and Johnson, 1995)

T:	–	teacher
L:	–	learner (not identified)
L1: L2: etc.	–	identified learner
LL:	–	several learners at once or all the class
/ok/ok/ok/	–	coinciding or concurrent utterances by more than one learner
[do you understand?] [I see]	–	overlap between teacher and learner
=	–	turn continues, or one turn follows another without any pause.
. . .	–	pause of one second or less marked by three periods.
(4 sec)	–	silence; length given in seconds
((4 sec))	–	a stretch of incomprehensible speech with the length given in seconds
Ali	–	capitals are only used for proper nouns
?	–	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
accused word	–	shows that a syllable or is given extra stress

T Organizes Groups   –   editor's   commentaries
(in bold type)