

Developing dialogic interactions: Teacher talk in Saudi Arabian secondary schools' English language classes

Mohammed Judaya M Alanazi
B. A. (King AbdulAziz University), M. A. (University of Technology
Sydney)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
School of Education

University of Technology Sydney

September 2018

Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Mohammed Alanazi declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Education/Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Production Note:

Signature: Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 19/02/2019

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful and thankful to my Lord (Allah) the Almighty for his help, facilitation and endless support all the way from my birth to this stage of my life.

This work was accomplished with the help of many people, so I would like to acknowledge those who offered me support, assistance, encouragement, advice, care or love.

First and foremost, I would like to express a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to my principal supervisor, Dr Jacqueline Widin, who guided me through the different stages of my PhD journey with valuable comments, constructive feedback, patience and continuous encouragement and support.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Dr Terry Royce, who was generous and positive with his time, guidance and feedback on my thesis. My thanks go to Dr Don Carter, Dr Ross Forman and Professor Alastair Pennycook who provided guidelines and comments during my stage 1 assessment.

I am also grateful to all my brothers, colleagues and friends for their encouragement and caring attitude. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the teachers who volunteered to participate in this study. My thanks too are due to the schools' principals, parents and students for their collaboration. My thanks are also offered to all those at the University of Technology, Sydney who, in various ways, helped me in my studies.

My thanks are extended to the Saudi government for the Scholarship Program and for their financial support throughout my Master's and PhD studies. Also, I would like to thank Ministry of Education and the Authority of Education at Hafr Al-Batin.

I am deeply grateful and offer my tremendously sincere thanks to my father, Judaya, and mother, Haila, whose love and support have inspired, motivated and respected me during this long journey.

Finally, my special feelings, thanks and heartfelt gratitude are dedicated to my beloved wife, Kholoud, and my intelligent children, Malak, Tareq, Nouf, Amirah and Noor who have tolerated the time I have spent at my studies with a lot of patience. They were, more than anyone else, glad to see this thesis come to fruition.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Mom and Dad, my wife and children, whom trusted and encouraged me to accomplish this thesis.

Table of Contents

Certificate of Original Authorship	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Dedication	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Abbreviations	xi
Abstract	xii
Chapter 1.....	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Context and Rationale for the Study.....	5
1.3 Research Questions	6
1.4 Research Aims, Objectives and Scope	7
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	8
1.6 Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks.....	8
1.7 Organisation of the Thesis	10
1.8 Conclusion.....	11
Chapter 2.....	12
Saudi Schools in Context.....	12
2.1 History of Education in Saudi Arabia.....	12
2.1.1 Education policies before 2001.....	12
2.1.2 Education policies after 2001.....	14
2.2 The Current Education and School System in Saudi Arabia.....	15
2.3 English in Saudi Arabian Schools.....	18
2.3.1 English in the Current Saudi Education System	20
2.4 Education and Teaching Strategies in Saudi Secondary Schools	22
2.5 EFL Teachers' Qualifications and Training	25
2.6 Challenges of Teaching and Learning English in Saudi Arabia	26
2.7 Sociocultural Values and EFL Learning.....	28

2.8 Conclusion	31
Chapter 3.....	32
Literature Review	32
3.1 Teacher Talk	32
3.1.1 Definition of teacher talk	33
3.1.2 The teaching exchange sequence – IRF pattern	34
3.1.3 Features and functions of teacher talk	38
3.2 Conceptual Frameworks	42
3.2.1 Sociocultural perspective – Vygotskian theory.....	42
3.2.1.1 Dialogic pedagogy	44
3.2.1.2 Discourse analysis	46
3.2.1.3 Scaffolding Theory	48
3.2.1.4 Supportive teacher talk – Cullen’s F-move model	49
3.2.1.5 Dialogic teaching.....	51
3.2.1.6 Dimensions of teaching practice: Kumaravadivelu’s macro strategies	55
3.3 Teacher Talk in L1 and its Impact on L2 Learning and Acquisition	65
3.4 Studies of Teacher Talk in Saudi Arabia	67
3.4.1 Educational dialogue skills in the Saudi L1 context	70
3.5 Conclusion.....	74
Chapter 4.....	76
Methodology.....	76
4.1 Methodology: Case Study and Researcher Positioning	76
4.2 Research Sites and Participants	79
4.3 Data Collection and Recording.....	83
4.3.1 Observation of classroom interactions.....	84
4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews with teachers.....	85
4.4 Data Analysis	86
4.4.1 Data organisation.....	87
4.5 Validation of Research Findings	89
4.5.1 Triangulation	89
4.5.2 Trustworthiness	89
4.6 Ethical Considerations.....	91
4.7 Conclusion.....	92
Chapter 5.....	93

Findings: The Particularities of Teacher Talk and its Relationship to the Culturally-embedded Learning Particularities of Students	93
5.1 RQ1A: Particularities of TT	93
5.1.1 F-move discorsal repetition	94
5.1.2 F-move evaluation	100
5.1.3 Dictation and recitation	107
5.1.4 F-move discorsal elaboration.....	110
5.1.5 F-move discorsal reformulation.....	114
5.2 TT and the Culturally-embedded Learning Particularities of Students.....	119
5.2.1 Low willingness of students to communicate in English.....	120
5.2.2 Dominant indirect corrective feedback and display questions	123
5.2.3 Over-valuing grammatical competence.....	126
5.3 Conclusion.....	130
Chapter 6.....	132
Findings: Creating Learning Opportunities	132
6.1 Learning Opportunities created by Teachers.....	132
6.1.1 Negotiated interaction facilitation.....	133
6.1.1.1 Students' proficiency in pronunciation and teachers' role in correction	133
6.1.1.2 Varying repertoires of teacher talk.....	135
6.1.1.3 Teaching strategies to promote student interaction and risk-taking	140
6.1.1.4 Teacher self-confidence and ability to manage the classroom	142
6.1.2 Promoting learners' autonomy.....	144
6.1.2.1 Use of learning resources/teaching aids.....	145
6.1.2.2 Nature of classroom interactions	146
6.1.2.3 Teachers' subject matter knowledge and teaching skills interpreted as TT.....	147
6.1.3 Raising cultural awareness.....	148
6.1.3.1 Teachers' understanding of the sociocultural context of students' learning ...	148
6.1.3.2 Children's freedom of speech	150
6.1.3.3 Family contribution to learners' achievement.....	152
6.1.4 Maximising learning opportunities	154
6.1.4.1 Facilitating shared roles between teacher and learner in classroom culture ..	154
6.1.4.2 Balanced role sharing in classroom teaching.....	155
6.2 Summary of Findings on Macro Strategies	157
Chapter 7.....	159
Findings: The Role of Teachers' Attitudes and Characteristics in Shaping Classroom Discourse.....	159

7.1 Understanding Teachers' Roles and the Nature of Teacher Talk	159
7.1.1 Exercising authority: Rationales for display or referential questioning.....	160
7.1.1.1 Teachers' doubts about students' language proficiency	160
7.1.1.2 Managing the classroom: Implications of teacher-centeredness.....	162
7.1.1.3 Managing the classroom: Dominance of teacher talk	164
7.1.1.4 Creating a stimulating learning environment	166
7.1.1.5 Promoting dialogic talk: Teachers' use of feedback	168
7.1.2 Teachers' conceptual gaps and actual capabilities	172
7.1.2.1 Teaching experience, qualifications and peer learning	172
7.1.2.2 Teachers as error-tolerant facilitators	173
7.1.2.3 Teacher's professional development.....	175
7.1.2.4 Misunderstandings about dialogic teaching/talk	176
7.2 Summary	179
Chapter 8.....	181
Discussion.....	181
8.1 Particularities of Teacher Talk (TT)	182
8.1.1 Improving language competence but limiting dialogic learning.....	183
8.1.1.1 F-Move Repetition (repetition, replication and questioning).....	184
8.1.1.2 F-move evaluation (direct correction, closed/display questions, code switching)	185
8.1.1.3 F-move dictation and recitation (corrective feedback)	187
8.1.2 Particularities of TT that encourage dialogic talk	189
8.1.2.1 F-move elaboration.....	189
8.1.2.2 F-move reformulation	190
8.2 Strategies to Promote Learning Opportunities.....	191
8.2.1 Negotiated interaction opportunities.....	191
8.2.2. Promoting learners' autonomy in the Saudi school context	192
8.2.3 Understanding one's students	192
8.2.4 Creating learning opportunities via a democratic classroom	193
8.3 Role of Teachers' Characteristics in Shaping Classroom Discourse	193
8.4 Particularities of TT, Learning Opportunities and Classroom Discourse.....	194
8.5 Conclusion.....	198
Chapter 9.....	199
Conclusion.....	199
9.1 Overview of the Study.....	199

9.2 Summary of Findings.....	200
9.3 Contextualising the Findings.....	202
9.4 Contributions of the Study.....	205
9.5 Implications of the Study	206
9.6 Limitations of the Study.....	208
9.7 Recommendations	209
References	212
Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview	232
Appendix 2: Parent Consent form in Arabic	233
Appendix 3: Parent Information Sheet in Arabic.....	235
Appendix 4: Student Consent Form in Arabic.....	238
Appendix 5: Student Information Sheet in Arabic.....	240
Appendix 6: Teacher Consent Form in Arabic.....	243
Appendix 7: Teacher Information Sheet in Arabic.....	245
Appendix 8: Teacher Invitation Letter in Arabic	248
Appendix 9: Parents’ Consent Form in English	249
Appendix 10: Parents’ Information Sheet in English	251
Appendix 11: Students’ Consent Form in English	254
Appendix 12: Students Information Sheet in English	256
Appendix 13: Teachers’ Consent Form in English.....	259
Appendix 14: Teachers Information Sheet in English	261
Appendix 15: Teachers Invitation Letter.....	263
Appendix 16: Department of Education permission letter.....	264
Appendix 17: Saudi Cultural Mission permission letter.....	265

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Kumaravadivelu's (1994) 10 Macro Strategies

Table 4.1 Characteristics of Participating Teachers

Table 4.2 Data Organisation, Methods of Analysis and Presentation of Findings

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 The Saudi educational system

Figure 2.2 The number of secondary school students in Saudi Arabia 2013-2016

Figure 4.1 Research Design and Methodology.

Figure 7.1 Three interacting roles in teacher talk.

List of Abbreviations

ACER Australian Council for Educational Research
ARAMCO Arabian American Company of Oil
CAH Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
CK Craft Knowledge
CD Classroom Discourse
DA Discourse Analysis
EFL English as Foreign Language
EL English Language
ELT English Language Teaching
ESL English as Second Language
FL Foreign Language
FLL Foreign Language Learning
F-Move Follow up /Feedback move
GAT General Ability Test
GPGE General Presidency of Girls Education
HSGPA High School GPA
IRF Incitation, Respond and Feedback
KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
L1 First language
L2 Second language
MKO More Knowledgeable Other
MoE Ministry of Education
MoHE Minister of High Education
PCK Pedagogical Content Knowledge
RQ1A Research Question One A
RQ1B Research Question One B
RQ2 Research Question Two
RQ3 Research Question Three
SAAT Standard Achievement Admission Test
SFL Systemic Functional Linguistics
SLA Second Language Acquisition
SL Second Language
SLL Second Language Learning
TL Target Language
TT Teacher Talk
TTT Teacher Talk Time
WTC Willingness To Communicate
ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

Abstract

This study investigated the nature of teacher talk in Saudi EFL secondary school classrooms. The study explores how teacher talk assisted or hindered the development of the students' dialogic skills. By analysing aspects of teacher talk (TT), in particular the role of the F-move in the IRF (initiation, response, feedback) interaction sequence, it investigated how TT was affected by certain cultural, educational and teaching practices in learning of the target language.

This is a qualitative research, in which data were collected from naturalistic settings through classroom observations, audio recordings of classroom interactions and interviews with 18 EFL teachers teaching in six different secondary schools within Hafr Al-Batin province (a region in Saudi Arabia).

The findings showed that the F-moves of repetition and evaluation were commonly used in Saudi EFL classrooms, whereas the F-moves of elaboration and reformulation were less dominant in teacher talk. The former are less likely to promote discussion and dialogue; they restrict learners' engagement with meaning-making in classroom talk because both F-moves function as indirect corrective feedback which impedes students' output and uptake and encourage low order thinking. Students were not provided with appropriate learning opportunities but were merely exposed to teachers' subject matter knowledge, specifically, grammatical knowledge. The brief nature of the exchanges was insufficient to stimulate learning.

The study also found that some teachers failed to utilise macro-teaching strategies that encourage productive teacher talk, especially in the areas of negotiated interaction facilitation, promoting learner autonomy, raising cultural awareness and maximising learning opportunities. Instead, the teacher's role did not promote dialogic talk but merely reinforced teacher authority. Some teachers spent considerable time on managing students' behaviour; as a result, they paid little attention to building positive relationships in the classroom.

The findings also showed that there is a strong interconnection between pedagogy and culture. In other words, dialogic teaching is not independent of the

sociocultural setting of the classroom, institution and community in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, classroom talk cannot be transformed into dialogic talk without cultural modifications in EFL teaching, such as providing freedom of speech and space for dialogue and debate. It is therefore recommended that professional development programs include material related to dialogic talk/teaching in order to increase teachers' awareness and understanding of the role of TT in managing classroom talk and to enhance their ability to help students achieve their full potential in language learning and development.