

# The Impact of Using Classroom Interaction on Teaching English Grammar for 1st Year Iraqi EFL University Learners

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The modern world has witnessed dramatic changes in the disciplinary field of Applied Linguistics. New theories, methods and findings of linguistics were applied to the conceptual areas of language teaching and learning. There is a new awareness of the modern linguistics methods in teaching and learning human language as a phenomenon of communication. The contemporary views of language teaching allows a prominent role for interaction while learning for the reason that "language is acquired as learners actively engaged in attempting to communicate in the target language" (Nunan , 2001 : 51).

**Key words:** Classroom Interaction, Teaching English

## Introduction

Following the contemporary perception of foreign language learning as a growing, socially distributed process, positioned in the larger context of social interaction, the classroom has been defined as a social site for language learning. This has led to an increased sensitivity to the institutional organisation of classroom discursive activities and to the complicated details of classroom interactions. Instead of perceiving language, a new language is inherently linked to learners' participation in various communicative practices in formal and informal settings (Hadley 2003: 86).

Conventionally, learning by heart and the repetition principles of the audio-lingual method have been at the heart of foreign language education. Nowadays, in foreign language classrooms, communicative or interactive language pedagogy have syllabuses that necessitates language teaching and learning, as well students' active involvement in simulated communicative activities, role playing, dialogues, acting, dramatisations, and discussions in classroom interaction (Lantolf and Aljaafreh, 1995: 62). Generally speaking, such pedagogical



activities involve rather complex communicative tasks, situations and environments that require the employment of perspective-taking skills, planning, performance and the recognition of a variety of communicative roles and genres (Nunan, 2001: 77) .

### ***Problem***

Classroom interaction is considered a major skill in teaching English as a foreign language. The word, “interaction,” refers to extensive situations in the education process among learners and teachers by classroom interaction. This hypothesis states that there is a biologically determined period of the classes when language can be acquired more easily. Beyond this time, learning is increasingly difficult.

Many difficulties are faced students in speaking English as a second language. For example, they cannot practice it, because they have not spoken it in their classrooms. Most children learn English as a foreign language in a natural setting where the formal classroom available.

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### ***The Aims of the Study***

This research aims at:

- 1- Investigating the difficulties faced by students in learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- Investigating the recognition and production levels to assess the process of learning and communication.
- 3- Helping both teachers and students to learn through interaction will make a suitable climate, consequently they will be motivated in such an exciting and pleasant environment.
- 4- Make lessons of English available as a foreign language for students.

### ***Hypotheses***

It is hypothesised that:

- 1- Most students faced difficulty while learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- Most students lack fluency in speaking, and their performance in written skill is much better than in speaking skill.
- 3- A lot of teachers conduct the class without preparing the aids needed for the techniques of classroom interaction.



### ***Limits of the Study***

The study will abide to the following limitations:

- 1- This research focuses only on the students learning English as a foreign language by the early stages at school.
- 2- All teachers teaching English as a foreign language will provide some activities and skills, which will help them in their tasks.

### ***Significance of the Problem***

This research will be valuable for teachers of English as a foreign language who may face difficulty during their tasks by providing some techniques of classroom interaction in teaching and developing learners.

The new learners of English will listen attentively, and they may even be able to recognise the words they use in their everyday conversation with their partner in group.

For that there is a relationship between teaching through interaction and the use of language in everyday communication. Cooperative learning techniques helps students to play a part in the language classroom by cooperating with each other to accomplish the learning tasks which cannot be achieved by studying alone.

## **Section Two**

### ***Introduction***

The world around us has witnessed changes in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language. The winds of change have blew on the western world in the 1960s and the 1970s of the twentieth century, resulting in radical changes in the methodology of teaching. Contemporary views of language teaching give a prominent role for interaction while learning, for the reason that "language is acquired as learners actively engaged in attempting to communicate in the target language" (Nunan, 2001: 51).

In line with the contemporary perception of foreign language learning as a growing, socially distributed process, positioned in the larger context of social interaction, the classroom has been defined as a social site for language learning. This has led to an increased sensitivity to the institutional organisation of classroom discursive activities and to the complicated details of classroom interactions. Instead of perceiving language learning as the acquisition of isolated



grammatical features, learning a new language is inherently linked to learners' participation in various communicative practices in informal and formal settings (Hadley, 2003: 86).

Conventionally, learning by heart and the repetition principles of the audio-lingual method have been at the heart of foreign language education. Nowadays, in foreign language classrooms, communicative or interactive language pedagogy have syllabuses that necessitates language teaching and learning, as well students' active involvement in simulated communicative activities, role playing, dialogues, acting, dramatisations, and discussions in classroom interaction (Lantolf and Aljaafreh, 1995: 62). Generally speaking, such pedagogical activities involve rather complex communicative tasks, situations and environments that require the employment of perspective-taking skills, planning, performance and the recognition of a variety of communicative roles and genres (Nunan, 2001: 77).

### ***Teacher and Learner Roles***

The teacher in foreign language is seen as the cornerstone of the teaching process in the Audio-Lingual Method, which is teacher-directed. The heavy weight of teaching is laid on his shoulders. He is the model of language instruction. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001:62-3), the role of the teacher includes the following:

- He introduces and directs the instruction of the four skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Corrects the mistakes of his students rapidly. Reinforces the correct responses because mistakes are bad and might hinder learning.
- Controls and keeps the flow of learning by using various exercises and drills which are represented in a suitable situation to practice structure.
- Reinforces learning by using the suitable trials.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001 :62), the students are seen as an "organism that can be directed by skills training techniques to produce correct responses." They only respond to what the teacher asks them to do, they are not allowed to initiate interaction (especially in the early stages of instruction ) for the reason that they might commit mistakes which hinders their learning. They have only to repeat what the teacher says at the beginning (even if they do not understand) to learn the accurate structure.

### **Classroom Interaction**

Brown and Attardo (2005: 79) use the word classroom to refer to extensive situations where the educational process of EFL takes place among learners and teachers. These situations



include: "classes in schools, multi-media, distance learning situation, one-to-one tutoring, on-the-job training, computer-based instruction, and so on."

Mortensen (1972:12) states that Classroom Interaction depends on verbal and non-verbal interactions. He argues that verbal and non-verbal interactions are complementary aspects of the communicative act. Non-verbal interaction includes all non-linguistic or extra-linguistic aspects of behaviour, which contribute to the meaning of message. These include body movements, gestures, facial expressions, contact, etc, while verbal interaction includes words as discrete entities. Classrooms of language tutoring where EFL instruction takes place are seen as discourse communities and sociolinguistic environments where interaction is considered a key factor to a learner's foreign language development.

Heringer (1978:53) maintains that, "human actions can only be possible as social action and thus only a theory of action that is based on interaction is capable of explaining human action." Thus, human interaction depends on the following three elements:

1. No less than two participants; P1 and P2 are concerned.
2. Participants act in relation to at least one constituent.
3. The act(s) of the participant who does not start shall be grasped as a reaction to an act of the participant who begins (ibid: 55).

### ***Types of Classroom Interaction***

Brown and Attardo (2005:81-85) divide CI into three kinds which are useful to promote language learning. They comprise the following.

### ***Teacher Interactions with Learners***

This type of interaction deals with the ongoing process of CI between teachers and their students. Because of its importance in promoting EFL education, researchers in this field have built up many research tools to scrutinise and analyse CI. "Over twenty observation instruments have been developed just for studying classroom interaction in second language classes... most of these focus on the teacher." Among these twenty instruments the following are considered of critical value:

- 1 Teacher questions
- 2 Teacher error correction
- 3 Quantity of teacher speech
- 4 Teacher explanations
- 5 Teacher 'wait-time' for student response (Brown and Attardo, 2005:81)



Throughout this process learners commit mistakes and errors, but it is preferable for the teacher not to confuse the teaching-learning process by telling learners that this is wrong, or that they have performed wrongly. Instead, his duty would be to lead his student(s) to recognise their mistake and direct them to avoid such an error in the future (ibid: 89).

### ***Learner-to-learner Interactions***

In this type, the focus is on the interactions of learners among themselves to find out "what goes on [among the] conconvocation of learners and how...learner-to-learner interactions contribute to language acquisition" (ibid :84). Therefore, there is an "increasing emphasis is placed on language learning tasks which involve pair work and group work" (ibid:64) in communicative language teaching (CLT).

Another approach to language teaching, cooperative learning, also places a heavy weight on the ways of student interactions and their final achievements. In this approach learners are grouped in such a way that a social environment is created, where each learner contributes to his and his colleagues' development. (ibid:97).

### ***Student-text Interaction***

In this type, the learner acts as a reader and a participant in creating the text. That's why it is adopted in teaching reading and writing skills interactively.

Grabe (1988) posits a notion of interactivity in foreign language reading and makes a distinction between reading as an interactive process (interaction between top-down and bottom-up processing) and interactive models of reading (interaction between reader and author as if the reader and author were engaged in a text-based conversation) (Brown and Attardo, 2005: 107-108).

The learner draws upon his previous knowledge, as well as the facts found in the syllabus content. Recent views see comprehension as drawing upon both top-down and bottom-up processing, in what is known as interactive processing. The top-down processing (TDP) refers to: "The use of background knowledge, knowledge of text structures, and/or knowledge of the world to assist in the interpretation of discourse." (Nunan, 2001: 316). Bottom-up processing (BUP) involves: "Decoding the smallest elements (phonemes and graphemes) first, and using theses to decode and interpret words, clauses, sentences, and then whole texts" (ibid: 302). It is claimed that BUP influence TDP, and vice versa. According to Richards, *et al* (1992: 383–4), interactive processing is probably compensatory, that is, one type of processing will take over if there is a problem with the other type, and when the quality of the stimulus is good,



bottom-up processing is preferred, and it is only when stimulus quality deteriorates that top-down processing takes over as a compensatory device.

Interaction with the text usually occurs in distance learning through the worldwide internet, or via computer assisted interaction. In the first case the student interacts with a teacher and other learners, or with a teacher or other learner or learners, using internet services (chatting in particular). In the second case, the interaction takes place with a VCD or DVD by the use of a computer, with or without the supervision and assistance of the teacher (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 107–8).

### ***Interactive Teaching Skills***

There are several major interactive teaching skills that a teacher ought to master in order to promise CI. These skills are intermingled and related to each other like a network. Studies about teaching skills revealed that a unique characteristic of "teaching skills is their interactive nature" (Kyriacou, 1991: 33). The teacher faces varying situations, most of which are unexpected, thus he needs to redirect his performance to cope with these changes. Clark and Peterson (1986:54) noticed that successful teachers moderate and adjust their manners and tactics with regard to lesson progress. They also pointed out that with the passage of time a lot of interactions are converted into a custom which is somewhat conscious and the teacher just has to consider the more unpredictable circumstances that need careful attention and care. The following includes the essential interactive teaching skills, as Kyriacou (1991:79) calls them.

### ***Lesson Presentation***

Introducing new items in language teaching depends on a good start to the lesson. In the "presentation stage," the teacher introduces new topics and gives the students the necessary information about their meaning, their use and any correlated facts related to these topics or items (Richards, *et al*, 1992: 349). Kyriacou (1991: 33) defines lesson presentation as "the learning experiences you set up to achieve the intended learning outcomes by pupils." He continues his discussion saying that the growth and development in the methodology of EFL schooling resulted in inventing a series of teaching activities which "can [be] deployed to good effect, including, by way of example, exposition, practicals, worksheets, computer games, role-play and small-group discussion."

In this stage the teacher is expected to be self-assured, stress-free, sure of himself, decisive and draw the attention of the students in the lesson. He uses unexpected explanations and instructions, which match the students' needs. Another important issue is to distribute his questions, which are of different ranges and sorts, on the whole course material. To advance the students' education, the teacher uses various suitable learning activities. He also gives the



students the opportunity to organise their work and be actively engaged in the lesson. In addition to that the teacher respects and encourages the notes and contributions of the students and promotes their education. Finally, the learning products of the students ought to fit their needs and the teacher uses the data, sources and aids in order to attain a useful outcome (Kyriacou, 1991: 36–47).

## **Dialogue Teaching**

The term dialogue is intended to imply a deeper level of analysis or explanation than that which concerns itself only with the surface meaning of talk as isolated expressions made by individuals. When we talk about dialogue, we are talking about the joint enterprise of talk, as a cumulative (building up over time) activity which is aimed at some purpose or other. In education, the purpose we are most often interested in is learning, in a rather broad sense.

In classrooms such dialogue occurs in a variety of settings, including whole class work and group talk in group work contexts. Research indicates that the most effective sorts of dialogue

1. Are often not reflected in classroom talk;
2. Are not simply question and response exchanges, but are dialogic in nature;
3. Are mutually respectful, and involve exploratory talk which seeks to build a shared understanding between talk partners.

Dialogue is a recurring theme in this field, and in particular is covered in context in the sections described above.

You should consider throughout the relationship between dialogue, and assessment. You might find some of the items in the table below to be useful prompts: [www.oer.educ.cam.ac.uk/wiki/Teaching\\_Approaches/Dialogue/](http://www.oer.educ.cam.ac.uk/wiki/Teaching_Approaches/Dialogue/) 2/3/2018.

## **Teaching Dialogue**

### ***Presenting the Dialogue***

1. Introduce the activity telling Ss that they're going to read & listen a dialogue.
2. Present the most important or the key individual words included in the dialogue.
3. Ask Ss to look at the dialogue and the pictures to talk about the scene of it:
  - a. Who are the speakers?
  - b. Where are they?



- c. What are they talking about?
  - d. What do you think is happening in each picture?
4. Then ask Ss to read the whole dialogue silently or listen to it extensively to answer a question. The answer is the main idea of the dialogue.
  5. Next, ask or put two more questions on the board and ask Ss to listen to the dialogue on the cassette (or what is read by the teacher) to answer those questions.
  6. Read the dialogue aloud, this time to focus on the important phrases or expressions included in the dialogue.

### ***Practicing the Dialogue***

1. Invite pairs of Ss to the front of the class with their books to role play or act out the dialogue.
2. Write the dialogue on the board or distribute it printed on a paper with some missing parts. Ask Ss to work in pairs to fill in the gaps. Elicit the answers from as many pairs as possible.
3. Focusing on the important language functions included in the dialogue, divide the dialogue into mini dialogues, each one including a prompt and its response, give each mini dialogue with a missing part, and ask Ss to fill in the gaps in pairs and act out each situation.
4. Invite pairs of Ss to the front of the class without their books to role play or act out the dialogue telling them that some personal modifications should be done (<https://eltguide.wordpress.com/how-to-teach-a-dialogue/2/3/2018>).

### **Section Three**

#### ***Classroom Interaction Activities***

There are different types of Classroom Interaction activities which share the objective of students' involvement in interaction, whether "face-to-face interaction" or "computer-mediated communication." Language is used in these activities for carrying out meaningful tasks and to enhance language learning. These activities or tasks are "the interactive learning procedures through which learners both in and out of the classroom learn to understand each other and to make themselves understood, so gaining confidence and experience in using the target language" (Hall and Hewings, 2001: 2). Some of the activities which are designed for FTF interaction can be used in CMC, like interactive games and a jigsaw for instance.

#### ***Role-Play***

Role-play or role playing, as Richards, *et al.* (1992: 318) name it, involve "drama-like classroom activities in which students take the ROLES of different participants in a situation and act out what might typically happen in that situation." The role-play may take many forms, but fundamentally it is improvisation. According to Robinson (1981: 385), the partakers



develop their own qualities, discussions, movements, situations, structures, themes, and messages. This may be organised personally or in groups, shortly ahead of time or exceeding a period of days. Nevertheless there is no absolute draft to be learnt by heart, and the idea for the improvisation may come from a written text and particular phrases may be memorised. In role playing the students have the opportunity to experience innovative ideas. They are able to learn from their errors.

The teacher exploits role playing to improve the learning process and the students' concentration. Therefore, according to Bartley (2002: 2), the teacher can devise a role playing activity in which he puts the students in educational circumstances that involve reasoning to arrive at the solution, because role-play provides students the chance to use their sensations and exercise interpersonal abilities in an imaginative life situation without taking the risks of failure in real life. Role playing is important in providing feedback for students as compared with real life situations. Moreover, performing roles can revive the learner's passions and imagination while stimulating previous education leading to thought provoking learning experience.

Consequently, role playing is a technique the teacher employs to assist students to comprehend the difficult areas in their study, whether in literature, social studies, and even some aspects of science or mathematics. Furthermore, it can help them to pay attention and turn out to be more involved, not only by studying the text, but also through training to incorporate the information in action by dealing with dilemmas, exploring alternatives, and seeking novel and creative solutions. Role playing is the best way to develop the skills of communication, problem-solving, self-awareness, and teamwork. These skills above all, and certainly above the learning of mere facts, which will be archaic or irrelevant in a few years, will help these young people be prepared for dealing with the challenges of the Twenty-First Century (ibid:91).

### ***Cooperative Learning***

Cooperative learning techniques permit EFL students to enthusiastically play a part in the language classroom, cooperating with each other to accomplish the learning tasks which cannot be achieved by studying alone. CL activities give the students the opportunity to exploit their assorted knowledge about the processing of the world, producing more effective characters of the group members, more precise personal characteristics, and a better awareness of sponsorship in the educational population. CL gives the students a reduced amount of feeling that they are separated as learners and establishes a more efficient "classroom culture" in which cooperation to achieve a mutual aim acts as a considerable function in their sensitive and linguistic progress as an authorised member of a social learning community (Murphey and Asaoka, 2006:98). More than merely a method for language teaching, CL is an approach for



giving students the confidence to carry on the two-way learning procedure perfectly outside the classroom and school structure into the larger world.

CL techniques are intended to expand the quantity of comprehensible input in addition to promoting motivation and self-confidence through shared interactions involving colleagues. Wenger (2006:104) states that this objective can simply take place through amplified interaction between student-learning communities, which need to "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information." This alteration in student-student relationships also requires a steady modification in the task of the teacher in the classroom, from the "autocratic model" to the "democratic model" (ibid). Students are able to gain knowledge of how to successfully educate each other, and greater competence in explaining their own tutoring through verbal communication and observing their language use. As the proverb says, "Those who teach learn twice" (Murphey and Jacobs, 2000:40).

Proficient, well-planned CL activities involve each person in a group to carry out particular tasks and responsibilities for the period of the group endeavour, to guarantee a remarkable degree of collaboration and success by all learners in the class.

### ***The Basic Pattern***

The basic pattern of CL activities begins with a square-shape group session that consists of four students. "The person sitting next to the learner is his or her shoulder partner, while the learners seated directly behind or in front of him or her are face partners" (Apple, 2006: 289). For large classes and classrooms with seating arrangements or spaces that may restrict movement around the classroom, this arrangement is typical.

### ***Write-pair-switch***

Three basic techniques of CL that use the basic four-person group pattern consist of "Write-pair-switch," "Heads Together," and "Traveling Heads Together" (Kagan, 1994:95). In the first technique, "Write-pair-switch," every student initiates the CL activity by acting individually at his desk. To accomplish this technique, the teacher usually asks the learner to write down answers to certain questions in the first place. Secondly, "pair," each student in every pair shares the answers with the "shoulder partner" (the person sitting next to him). In the last phase, "switch," the students alter colleagues and have a discussion with their face colleagues sitting opposite or behind them. Throughout this step, the students sum up what they have been taught from each other using their expressions. The "write" section of the technique during the lecture can be assigned as homework, then, in the next lecture, start with the "pair" work directly, while students evaluate answers from their homework.



### ***Jigsaw***

An additional form of Traveling Heads Together is termed "Jigsaw," and requires the students of all the groups to comprise new groups (Jacobs, *et al.*, 2002: 32). Having the status of the Numbered Heads Together, the teacher gives the students numbers within their specific "home team" groups. In the home group, each student works on another question or part of the homework assignment. Then, when a precise amount of time passes, the students who have the same number will form new groups. For example, students who are numbered 1 will make a new "expert" group of four with other "number 1" students, and so on. In the case of classes that contain a greater number of students, the teachers can formulate two or three "expert" groups per number, to make sure that learners preserve the four-person group model. Once the students compare answers of the same items together with members of their "expert" group, they go back to their "home team" groups and transmit the information they have acquired to the original group members.

### ***Carousel***

Apple (2006: 291) says that this technique, which is also named "Merry-go-round," a reference to the spinning wheel of wooden or plastic horses often seen at carnivals and amusement parks, can be used with group presentations such as posters." Every group makes a "poster" and sticks it on a side of the classroom. Then, the other groups go around the room respectively, examining and evaluating their classmates' posters. Carousel may take different patterns, as well as various means to present their work, whether "oral, written, video recorded, on paper or on computer," and varying ways to comment or assess the outcomes of their colleagues, being plain remarks, extended précis, unusual types for evaluation, etc..

### ***Roles***

Each student in the group, while performing the CL activities, enacts a certain role, and if this role is not accomplished, the endeavour of the group falls short in meeting its whole aim. There are many possible roles, but the most frequent ones are:

- A. "Facilitator": the learner assigned to this role has the responsibility to keep the group stick to its task.
- B. "Recorder": the student's duty is to write down the answers and conclusions of the group.
- C. "Summariser": in this role the student summarises the group answers.
- D. "Reporter": the student is in charge of transmitting the ideas of the group to the other group(s).
- E. "Time-keeper": whose responsibility is to check the time remaining to complete the homework assignment.



Sometimes other roles might appear, this of course depends on the description of the task and the required time to finish it. In case the teacher employs CL roles in the classroom for the first time, he may nominate the roles to his students. However, the students' motivation might increase when they are permitted to choose their roles in the group. Teachers should observe that each student adopts a different role while carrying out any task to ensure that each student performs all the possible roles. (Apple, 2006: 292–293).

## **Conclusions**

This study has investigated the efficiency of using techniques of CI in teaching English to develop the achievements of EFL learners. The findings of the present study can be worded as follows:

1. In light of the higher results of the subjects of the experimental group compared with the subjects of the control group, the first conclusion is that the use of CI activities in teaching English is more effective in improving the achievement of Iraqi EFL university learners than the use of teacher directed instruction.
2. There is a relationship between teaching through interaction and the use of language in everyday communication, for the reason that CI activities are based on the integration of the grammatical forms with their notions and functions.
3. Teaching through interaction creates a suitable climate, which is similar to the real world for learning a foreign language. Consequently, students will be motivated in such an exciting, joyful and pleasant environment.
4. The less the number of students in the class, the more the opportunities to interact and negotiate the meaning among students will be.
5. Syllabus designers should stress the implementation of CI in the educational curriculum, at all levels, for all subjects, and for foreign languages in particular.



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