

# Classroom Interaction for Language Teachers

Steve Walsh

English  
Language  
Teacher  
Development  
Series

Thomas S. C. Farrell,  
Series Editor



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# About the Author

Steve Walsh is Professor of Applied Linguistics in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, UK. He has been involved in English Language Teaching for more than 20 years in a range of overseas contexts. His research interests include classroom discourse, teacher development and second language teacher education.

# Series Editor's Preface

The English Language Teacher Development (ELTD) Series consists of a set of short resource books for English language teachers that are written in a jargon-free and accessible manner for all types of teachers of English (native and nonnative speakers of English, experienced and novice teachers). The ELTD series is designed to offer teachers a theory-to-practice approach to English language teaching, and each book offers a wide variety of practical teaching approaches and methods for the topic at hand. Each book also offers opportunities for teachers to interact with the materials presented. The books can be used in preservice settings or in in-service courses and can also be used by individuals looking for ways to refresh their practice.

Steve Walsh's book *Classroom Interaction for Language Teachers* explores different approaches to interaction in the language classroom and the various challenges this may present to a language teacher. Steve provides a comprehensive overview of how interaction works in the language classroom in an easy-to-follow guide that language teachers will find very practical for their own contexts. Topics include the nature of classroom interaction, the structure of L2 classroom interaction, communication and interaction, and the future of classroom interaction. *Classroom Interaction for Language Teachers* is a valuable addition to the literature in our profession.

I am very grateful to the authors who contributed to the ELTD Series for sharing their knowledge and expertise with other TESOL professionals, because they have done so willingly without any

compensation to make these short books affordable to all language teachers throughout the world. It is truly an honor for me to work with each of these authors as they selflessly gave up their valuable time for the advancement of TESOL.

*Thomas S. C. Farrell*

# Introduction

This book offers an introduction to classroom interaction. The aim is to help language teachers improve their professional practice by developing a closer understanding of classroom interaction and, in particular, by focusing on the complex relationship between language, interaction, and learning. The book provides an introductory account of current perspectives, aiming to promote a fuller understanding of interaction, which is regarded as being central to effective teaching. While classroom interaction has been the focus of attention for researchers for more than 50 years, the complex relationship between language, interaction, and learning is still only partially understood. The case is made for a need not only to describe classroom discourse, but to ensure that teachers and learners develop the kind of interactional competence which will result in more engaged, dynamic classrooms where learners are actively involved in the learning process.

The book is organised in four chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the main features of classroom interaction and considers how it is typically structured. Chapter 3 considers the ways in which classroom interaction is structured by focusing on context, while chapter 4 looks at the relationship between interaction and teaching. Chapter 5 sets out some key challenges for teachers in the future.

# 2

## The Nature of Classroom Interaction

This chapter looks at some of the features of interaction in the language classroom, providing a brief sketch of these features.

### REFLECTIVE BREAK

Think about your own experiences as a learner or teacher then answer these three questions:

- Why is interaction in the classroom so important?
- In what ways can teachers make effective use of their language?
- What is the relationship, if any, between the language used by teachers and learners and the learning that occurs?

When we reflect on classes that we have been in, either as teachers or learners, we quickly realise that classroom interaction is both highly complex and central to all classroom activity. In the rapid flow of classroom interaction, it is difficult to comprehend what is happening. Not only is the interaction very fast and not only does it involve many people, but it has many elements; any stretch of language may perform several functions at the same time: seeking information, checking learning, offering advice, and so on.

Given its complexity and centrality to teaching and learning, it is fair to say that any endeavour to improve teaching and learning should



begin by looking at classroom interaction. Everything that occurs in the classroom requires the use of language. Most important, in a language classroom, it is through language in interaction that we access new knowledge, acquire and develop new skills, identify problems of understanding, deal with “breakdowns” in the communication, establish and maintain relationships, and so on. Language, quite simply, lies at the heart of everything. This situation is further complicated when we consider that in a language classroom, the language being used is not only the means of acquiring new knowledge, it is also the *goal* of study: “the vehicle and object of study” (Long, 1983, p. 134). For English language teaching (ELT), then, there is a pressing need to understand both the language we are teaching and the language we are using *for* teaching.

Yet, despite the obvious importance of classroom interaction, until recently, little time has been given to helping teachers understand it. Most teacher education programmes devote a considerable amount of time to teaching methods and to subject knowledge. Few, I suggest, devote nearly enough time to developing understandings of interactional processes and the relationship between the ways in which language is used to establish, develop, and promote understandings. Teachers and learners, arguably, need to acquire what I call “classroom interactional competence” (CIC, Walsh, 2013) if they are to work effectively together. That is, teachers and learners must make use of a range of appropriate interactional and linguistic resources in order to promote active, engaged learning.

Let’s go back to the three questions you were asked at the beginning of this chapter and answer each in turn.

### **Why Is Interaction in the Classroom so Important?**

To some extent, the first question has been answered: Communication in the classroom is so important because it underpins everything that goes on in classrooms. It is central to teaching, to learning, to managing groups of people and the learning process, and to organising the various tasks and activities that make up classroom practices. Communication refers to the ways in which language is used to promote interaction; according to van Lier (1988, p. 87), interaction is “the most important thing on the curriculum.” If we are to become effective as teachers, we need not only understand classroom communication, we need to improve it.

## **In What Ways Can Teachers Make Effective Use of Their Language?**

When we consider the second question, we must first define what we mean by “effective.” Given that the main concern of teachers is to promote learning, *effective*, here, means language that promotes learning. There are many ways in which teachers can influence learning through their choice of language and their interactional decision making. We come back to this later in the chapter. For the time being, *effective* simply means using language that helps, rather than hinders, the learning process (Walsh, 2002).

## **What Is the Relationship, if Any, Between the Language Used by Teachers and Learners and the Learning That Occurs?**

Our third question is more difficult to answer. There is no clear and exact response to this question. According to Ellis (1996), this relationship can be seen as a strong one, where language use has a direct influence on the learning that takes place; a weak one, where there is some link between the language used and the learning that occurs; or a zero one, where there is simply no relationship at all between the language used by teachers and the learning that ensues. And, of course, this relationship is difficult to assess given that there are so many other factors that influence learning. However, the very fact that this question is often asked does suggest that there is a relationship between classroom language use and learning.

In the remainder of this section, I will present some of the most important features of second language classroom interaction; they are important because they are the features that are most likely to influence learning and learning opportunities. Four features of classroom interaction have been selected, largely because they typify much of the interaction that takes place in language classrooms and are prevalent in all parts of the world:

- Control of the interaction
- Speech modification
- Elicitation
- Repair

## Control of the Interaction

One of the most striking features of any classroom is that the roles of the participants (teacher and learners) are not equal, they are asymmetrical. This is true of all classrooms: primary, secondary, university, monolingual, and multilingual; with adult, teenager, or very young learners. We can say that the teacher is in a position of power or authority; he or she has full control of the patterns of communication that occur and is able to direct and manage the interaction. In language classrooms, teachers control patterns of communication by managing both the topic of conversation and turn-taking, while students typically take their cues from the teacher through whom they direct most of their responses. Even in the most decentralised and learner-centred classroom, teachers decide who speaks, when, to whom, and for how long. Teachers are able to interrupt when they like, take the floor, hand over a turn, direct the discussion, switch topics. As Breen (1998) puts it, it is the teacher who “orchestrates the interaction” (p. 119).

Learners, on other hand, do not enjoy the same level of control of the patterns of communication, although there will certainly be times when the roles of teacher and learners are more equal, allowing more even turn-taking and greater participation by learners. For much of the time, learners respond to the cues given by teachers: in the form of a spoken response, an action (such as opening a book, changing seats), or a change of focus (from a PowerPoint slide to course book, for example, or from listening to the teacher to talking to a classmate).

If we look now at some ELT classroom data, we can see quite clearly how teachers control the interaction. Look at Extract 1, in which a group of multilingual, intermediate adult EFL students are discussing issues about law and order in their respective countries. (Please note: transcripts are based on the principles of conversation analysis. See Appendix A for notes on transcription.)

### Extract 1

- 1 T: Okay Erica could you explain something about law and order in Japan what
- 2 happens if you commit a crime?
- 3 L1: almost same as Britain policeman come to take somebody to police station
- 4 T: yes
- 5 L1: and prisoner questioned and if he is ((5))=

- 6 T: =yes what's the verb Eric Erica...if she or he yes commits a crime they go  
7 to  
8 L1: they go to court yes but if they he they didn't do that they can go home  
9 T: they can go home (3) very good indeed right what happens in Brazil

In line 1, we see how the teacher nominates a student (Erica), thereby determining who may speak. Her question, “what happens if you commit a crime?”, both establishes the topic and provides a cue for Erica, who must now reply to the question, which she does in line 3. In line 5, we can see that the learner is experiencing some difficulty and the teacher interrupts in line 6. Again, in line 6, the teacher is controlling the interaction, seeking clarification and correcting an error (“what's the verb?”). Not only does the teacher control the topic, she controls the precise content of the learner's subsequent utterance in line 8, “they go to court.” Finally, in line 9, the teacher brings L1's contribution to an end with, “they can go home,” controlling participation by inviting a response from another student: “what happens in Brazil?”

Breen's (1998) powerful metaphor of the teacher orchestrating the interaction is in evidence throughout this extract. Arguably, a teacher's ability to orchestrate the interaction in this way not only determines who may participate and when, but it influences opportunities for learning. It is also apparent when we look at Extract 1 that teachers have control over the amount of “space” learners have in the interaction. For every contribution made by the student, the teacher typically makes two: asking a question (1, 6) and giving feedback (4, 9). The consequence of this is that teachers clearly talk more and occupy more of the interactional space of the classroom. Learners' opportunities to contribute are largely controlled by the teacher. This three-part discourse structure, comprising a teacher question, learner response, and teacher feedback is another feature of classroom discourse that shows how teachers control the interaction. We discuss this in some detail under “Exchange Structure” in Chapter 3.

To summarise, we have seen that teachers, through their unique status in a classroom, and by the power and authority they have, control both the content and procedure of a lesson, as well as participation.

## Speech Modification

One of the most obvious features of all classroom discourse is teachers' modification of their spoken language. In some respects, teachers' use of a more restricted code is similar to the spoken language used by parents talking to young children. Typically, a teacher's speech is slower, louder, more deliberate, and makes greater use of pausing and emphasis. Teachers also make a great deal of use of gestures and facial expressions to help convey meaning. The modification strategies used by teachers are not accidental; they are conscious and deliberate and occur for a number of reasons.

The first, and obvious, one is that learners must understand what a teacher is saying if they are going to learn. It is highly unlikely that learners will progress if they do not understand their teacher. A second reason is that, for much of the time, teachers model language for their students. That is, they use appropriate pronunciation, intonation, sentence and word stress, and so on in order to give learners an opportunity to hear the sounds of the target language. In many cases and in many parts of the world, a teacher's articulation of a second language (L2) may be the only exposure to the language that learners actually receive. It is important, therefore, that the L2 is modelled correctly and appropriately. A third reason for speech modification is the fact that there is so much happening at any one moment in a classroom that teachers need to ensure that the class is following, that everyone understands, and that learners don't get lost in the rapid flow of the discourse.

An understanding of the ways in which second language teachers modify their speech to learners is clearly important. What strategies do teachers use to modify their speech? We can look at modified speech in two ways: the first considering features of their *language*, the second, features of their *interaction*. There are several features of spoken classroom language that teachers normally modify in some way. Perhaps the most obvious one is the use of simplified vocabulary and the absence of more idiomatic or regional variations. Grammar, too, is frequently simplified through the use of simpler and shorter utterances, the use of a more limited range of tenses, and fewer modal verbs. Pronunciation is also often clearer, with slower articulations and wider use of standard forms.

Second, teachers modify their interactional resources to assist comprehension and help learners find their way. The most common is the use of transition markers to signal the beginnings and endings of various activities or stages in a lesson. Words such as *right, ok, now, so, alright*—typically discourse markers—perform a very important function in signalling changes in the interaction or organisation of learning. They function like punctuation marks on a printed page: Consider how difficult it would be to read a newspaper without punctuation. The same applies in a classroom if teachers fail to make appropriate use of transition markers. This important category of discourse markers enables teachers to guide learners through the discourse, hold student attention, announce a change in activity, and signal the beginning or end of a lesson stage. Crucially, they help a class stay together and work in harmony.

In addition to these more obvious ways in which teachers modify their speech, there are other more subtle strategies that teachers use in order to clarify, check, or confirm meanings. These include confirmation checks, where teachers make sure they understand learners; comprehension checks, ensuring that learners understand the teacher; repetition; clarification requests, asking students for clarification; reformulation, rephrasing a learner's utterance; turn completion, finishing a learner's contribution; and backtracking, returning to an earlier part of a dialogue. These strategies are used to ensure that the discourse flows well and that the complex relationship between language use and learning is maintained.

An example of how this works is presented in Extract 2. Here, the teacher is working with a group of upper intermediate, adult ESL learners, and the focus is academic writing.

## REFLECTIVE BREAK

Look at Extract 2.

- How does this teacher clarify meaning, confirm understanding, show approval?
- Do you think the interaction flows well?

## Extract 2

- 1 T: =yes so tell me again what you mean by that=  
2 L: =the first is the introduction the second eh in this case we have the ((3))  
3 who you are to eh introduce yourself a few words about yourself and where  
4 you live and what I do [and]  
5 T: [so]...yes?=  
6 L: =and then it's the problem what happened...  
7 T: yes=  
8 L: =and you need to explain it and why you are writing because probably  
9 you did something like you gave the information to the police but it didn't  
10 happen...  
11 T: so can I ask you why did you write it in your head as you said?=  
12 L: =I don't know it's like a rule=  
13 T: =right so it's like a rule what do you mean?...

By seeking clarification and by negotiating meaning, the teacher helps the learners to express themselves more fully and more clearly. Note how learner turns are frequently longer and more complex than those of the teacher (2–4, 8–10). In this extract, the teacher works pretty hard to adopt a more facilitative role, seeking clarification (1, 5, 11, 13) and eliciting from the learners descriptions of their writing strategies. Clarification requests are extremely useful in creating opportunities for learning because they compel learners to reformulate their contribution, by rephrasing or paraphrasing. There is clear evidence in this extract that the teacher's unwillingness to accept the learner's first contribution (5 and 7) promotes a longer and higher quality contribution (8–10). Note, too, how the teacher shows confirmation and understanding (1, 5, 7, 13) through the backchannels “yes” and “right.” Backchannels are very important in all human interaction because they tell the speaker that the listener has understood and is following what is being said. They “oil the wheels” of the interaction and ensure that communication occurs. Consider how you feel during a telephone call when there is silence at the other end of the line—you have no way of knowing that you have been understood. The same is true in classroom interactions.

We have seen, then, that modified speech is a key element of classroom interaction and one that can have strong effects on the quantity and quality of learning that takes place. Effective speech modification

ensures that learners feel safe and included and gives them the confidence to participate in the interaction. It also minimises breakdowns and misunderstandings and creates a sense of purposeful dialogue in which a group of learners is engaged in a collective activity.

## Elicitation Techniques

Elicitation techniques are the strategies used, normally by teachers, to get learners to respond. Typically, elicitation entails asking questions.

### REFLECTIVE BREAK

Why do teachers ask so many questions? Add as many reasons as you can to the list below. Then suggest alternatives to asking questions that result in the same outcomes.

- To provide a model
- To check comprehension
- To test

Classroom discourse is dominated by question and answer routines, with teachers asking most of the questions (Brock, 1986), while learners ask correspondingly few questions. It is by asking questions that teachers are able to control the discourse, especially given that they know the answers to most of the questions they ask! Questions like these, where teachers already know the answer (for example, “what’s the past tense of *go*?”) are called *display questions*, because they require learners to display what they know (Long & Sato, 1983). Most of the time, teachers know the answer to the questions they ask, and this makes classrooms distinctive in interactional contexts. Imagine if you were to ask your friends or family questions to which you already know the answer—they would find this very strange, abnormal even! Yet in classrooms, this practice is the norm. Display questions serve a range of functions, including:

- Eliciting a response
- Checking understanding



- Guiding learners toward a particular response
- Encouraging participation

Essentially, the main purpose of display questions is to check or evaluate: understanding, concepts, learning, previous learning, and so on. Responses tend to be short, simple, restricted, often comprising one or two words. Rather than opening up space for learning (Walsh & Li, 2012), display questions tend to close it down and result in a rather stereotypical, almost mechanical type of interaction.

Apart from display questions, teachers also ask genuine, more open-ended questions, designed to promote discussion and debate, engage learners, and produce longer, more complex responses. These are called *referential questions* and usually lead to more natural responses by learners, often longer and more complicated, and resulting in a more conversational type of interaction. Referential questions often begin with a *wh-* question such as *who, why, what, when, where,* or *which*. From a teaching and learning perspective, the distinction between display and referential questions is less important than the relationship between a teacher's pedagogic goal and choice of question. Indeed, Seedhouse (1996) suggests that, rather than distinguishing types of question, we should be more concerned about looking at the purpose of a question and understanding what it is doing in the interaction at any given moment. If the aim is to quickly check understanding or establish what learners already know, display questions are perfectly adequate. If, on the other hand, the aim is to promote discussion or help learners improve oral fluency, then referential questions are more appropriate. The extent to which a question produces a communicative response is less important than the extent to which a question serves its purpose at a particular point in a lesson. In short, the use of appropriate questioning strategies requires an understanding of the *function* of a question in relation to what is being taught.

Consider Extracts 3 and 4. In Extract 3, the teacher is working with a group of low-intermediate adult ESL learners. The class has recently read a story and here, the teacher is simply recapping. It is immediately obvious that the turn-taking, participation, and contribution of each learner are all tightly controlled by the teacher's use of display questions.

### Extract 3

- 1 T: I'll see if I have a (2) a photocopy (**looks for papers**) right you can't find it?  
2 look you have this book and cos I've got another book here good...so can you  
3 11 read question 2 Junya  
4 L1: (**reading from book**) where was Sabina when this happened?  
5 T: right yes where was Sabina? (4) in unit ten where was she?  
6 L: er go out=  
7 T: =she went out yes so first she was in the=  
8 L: =kitchen=  
9 T: =kitchen good and then what did she take with her?  
10 L: =er drug=  
11 T: =good she took the memory drug and she ran OUT

In lines 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9, the teacher simply gets students to display what they already know from what they have read. The interaction is rapid and allows little space for full responses, indicated by the latched turns (=), where one turn follows another without pausing. Learner responses are short, typically two or three words, and there is no space here for topic development (6, 8, 10). We can surmise from this that the teacher's goal was to check understanding before moving on: Her choice of display questions here is entirely in tune with her teaching goal.

Compare Extract 3 with Extract 4. Here, it is immediately evident that learners have more interactional space and freedom in both what they say and when they say it. This is a multilingual group of advanced EFL learners, preparing for a reading activity on the supernatural.

### Extract 4

- 1 T: I agree do you do you believe in this kind of stuff? We talked about UFOs and  
2 stuff yesterday (2)  
3 L: no...  
4 L: well maybe ...  
5 T: maybe no why not? (7)  
6 L3: um I'm not a religious person and that's the thing I associate with religion and  
7 believe in supernaturals and things like that and believe in god's will and that's so far  
8 from me so no=  
9 T: I understand so and why maybe Monica? ...  
10 L4: well I'm also not connected with religion but maybe also something exists but I  
11 erm am rather sceptical but maybe people who have experienced things maybe=  
12 T: =uh huh and what about you [do you]

The teacher's opening question is seen by students as a genuine one—he is seeking the opinions of the group. Note the two second pause (2) and the relatively short responses by learners in 3 and 4. But it is the question *why not* in 5, accompanied by the 7 seconds of silence, which promotes the long learner turn in 6. Seven seconds of silence is very unusual in most classrooms; typically, the average wait time (the length time between a teacher's question and learner response) is around one second (Nunan, 1991). In lines 6–8, and following 7 seconds of silence, L3 produces an extended response and works hard to express herself. While to us, as outsiders, the meaning is not immediately apparent, the teacher seems satisfied with her contribution and moves on to another student, Monica. The teacher's comments (9, 12) are nonevaluative, relating more to the content of the message than the language used to express it. By being nonevaluative, asking genuine questions, and allowing pauses, the teacher succeeds in eliciting fuller, more complex responses from the learners and in promoting a more engaged, conversational type of interaction. His choice of questions is extremely important to the resulting extended learner turns and produces a more equal exchange, similar to casual conversation.

## Repair

*Repair* simply refers to the ways in which teachers deal with errors. It includes direct and indirect error correction and the ways in which teachers identify errors in the discourse. Clearly, there is a range of types of error correction available to a teacher at any point in time. As with all strategies, some will be more or less appropriate than others at any given moment. The basic choices facing a teacher are:

- (a) Ignore the error completely.
- (b) Indicate that an error has been made and correct it.
- (c) Indicate that an error has been made and get the learner who made it to correct it.
- (d) Indicate that an error has been made and get other learners to correct it.

It is apparent when we look at classroom transcripts that error correction occupies a considerable amount of teachers' time. According

to van Lier, “apart from questioning, the activity which most characterizes language classrooms is correction of errors” (1988, p. 276). He goes on to suggest that there are essentially two conflicting views of error correction: one which says we should avoid error correction at all costs because it affects the flow of classroom communication, and the other which says we must correct all errors so that learners acquire a “proper” standard. As teachers, we need to decide on the type and frequency of error correction. Again, the strategies selected must be related to the pedagogic goals of the moment. A highly controlled practice activity requires more error correction than one where the focus is oral fluency.

It is perhaps also true to say that, within the classroom, learners do expect to have their errors corrected. While it may not be appropriate in more naturalistic settings for speakers to correct each other’s errors, in classrooms, this is both what learners want and expect. As Seedhouse (1997) puts it, “making linguistic errors and having them corrected directly and overtly is not an embarrassing matter” (p. 571). Rather than deciding whether we should or should not correct errors, teachers would do well to consider the appropriateness of a particular strategy in relation to their intended goals. By adopting more conscious strategies and by understanding how a particular type of error correction impacts the discourse, teachers can do much to tailor their error correction to the moment and promote opportunities for learning.

A sample of data is perhaps the best way to gain a closer understanding of the need to tailor repair strategy to pedagogic goal. Consider Extract 5, in which the teacher is working with a group of eight preintermediate adult learners, studying foundation English at a U.K. university. Her stated aim is “to improve oral fluency.”

### **Extract 5**

- 1 T: what about in Spain if you park your car illegally?
- 2 L4: ... there are two possibilities
- 3 T: two [possibilities]
- 4 L4: [one] is er I park my car ((1)) and
- 5 T: yes ... if I park ... my car ... illegally again Rosa
- 6 L4: (**laughter**) if I park my car [illegally]
- 7 T: [illegally]
- 8 L4: police stat policeman er give me give me

- 9 T: GIVES me
- 10 L4: gives me? a little small paper if er I can't pay the money
- 11 T: it's called a FINE remember a FINE yes?
- 12 L4: or if if my car
- 13 T: is parked
- 14 L4: is parked illegally..the policeman take my car and...er...go to the
- 15 police station not police station it's a big place where where they have some
- 16 [cars] they

The most striking feature of the interaction is the overlapping speech (indicated with brackets). It is apparent from the data that this teacher believes that repair is necessary; there are examples of error correction in almost every teacher turn. The student is really unable to express herself adequately owing to the fact that the teacher interrupts so much in order to correct errors. It is only in lines 14–16 that she is really able to produce an extended turn, presumably something the teacher wanted throughout given her stated aim of improving oral fluency. While it is apparently this teacher's intention to help the learner by correcting errors, it is also clear that over-correction is not very helpful. The flow of the exchange is disrupted to the point that the learner is unable to clearly articulate what she wants to say.

## REFLECTIVE BREAK

Look at Extract 6. Comment on the teacher's error correction strategy.

- How appropriate is it here where the teacher is trying to elicit student feelings and attitudes?
- What is the effect of the error correction on the interaction?

### Extract 6

- 1 T: ok does anyone agree with his statement?
- 2 L2: (2) erm I am agree=
- 3 T: = agree be careful with the verb to agree there you as well Ensa that it's WE
- 4 agree it's not to be agree it's to agREE Ok=
- 5 L2: [oh I agree]

- 6 L: ((3))  
7 T: I agree with you but not I AM agree with you the verb is to agree ok so ((3)) to  
8 agree with (**writing on board**) is the preposition that follows it I so it's I agree  
9 with you I disagree with you ... ok em Silvie can you em what were you going  
10 to say?  
11 L2: I agree with you because em when when we talk about something em for  
12 Example you saw a ((2)) on TV=

(See a reflection on the error correction in this extract in Appendix B.)

In this chapter, I have described some of the most important features of classroom interaction and illustrated them using data extracts. These features were: teacher's control of the discourse, speech modification, elicitation, and repair. I have tried to show how different strategies are more or less appropriate according to the particular pedagogic goal of the moment and according to a teacher's understanding of local context.

In Chapter 3, I present a summary of the work on spoken interaction in classrooms, focusing on the most common patterns of interaction.

## The Structure of L2 Classroom Interaction

One of the most important features of all classroom discourse is that it follows a fairly typical and predictable structure, comprising three parts: a teacher **I**nitiation, a student **R**esponse, and a teacher **F**eedback, commonly known as **IRF**, or **IRE**: Initiation, Response, Feedback/Evaluation. IRE is preferred by some writers and practitioners to reflect the fact that, most of the time, teachers' feedback is an evaluation of a student's contribution. Teachers are constantly assessing the correctness of an utterance and giving feedback to learners.

This three-part structure was first put forward by Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975 and is known as the IRF exchange structure. The work of Sinclair and Coulthard had a huge impact on our understandings of the ways in which teachers and learners communicate, and it led to many advances in the field. IRF is also known as a *recitation script* or *tryadic structure*. (*Tryadic* simply refers to the fact that each exchange is made up of three moves: typically a question, a response, and then follow-up.)

Look at Extract 7.

### Extract 7

- |   |     |   |                      |
|---|-----|---|----------------------|
| 1 | T:  | <b>So</b> , can you read question two, Junya.                     | <b>I</b>             |
| 2 | L1: | ( <b>Reading from book</b> ) Where was Sabina when this happened? | <b>R</b>             |
| 3 | T:  | Right, yes, where was Sabina.<br>In Unit 10, where was she?       | <b>F</b><br><b>I</b> |
| 4 | L1: | Er, go out ...  | <b>R</b>             |
| 5 | T:  | She went out, yes.  | <b>F</b>             |

In Extract 7, we can see how the teacher opens the exchange and marks a new phase of activity with the discourse marker “so,” which is typical of all teacher-learner interaction and occurs very frequently in classrooms all around the world. This opening remark, or initiation (I), leads to the question in line 1, which prompts the student response [R] in line 2. In line 3, we see how the teacher offers feedback (F) to what the learner has said (“Right, yes”). Feedback is an important feature of the three-part exchange because it allows learners to see whether their response has been accepted or not. Frequently, feedback entails some kind of evaluation, such as *good, right, ok*.

In line 3, the cycle begins again, with the next initiation (“where was Sabina when this happened?”), which is then clarified in line 4 (“in unit 10, where was she?”). In line 5, we see the learner’s grammatically incorrect response (“she go out”), followed in line 6 by the teacher’s feedback and correction. This second IRF sequence follows very logically from the first and was probably followed by a third. Based on this very brief extract, we can make a number of observations about IRF, the most commonly occurring exchange structure in any classroom:

- It enables us to understand the special nature of classroom interaction.
- It enables us to understand why teachers talk so much more than learners: For every utterance made by a learner (R), teachers typically make two (I, F).
- It allows us to see how, if overused, classroom interaction can become very mechanical, even monotonous. Teachers need to be aware of this.
- While the IRF sequence is both commonly found and appropriate at certain times, there are other types of exchange that are more desirable and useful to learning. We’ll come back to this point later.

Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) original work took place in L1 primary classes. Based on recordings of teachers and pupils interacting in class, they produced a hierarchical model for understanding classroom discourse. They found that there were three basic kinds of exchange:



1. question-and-answer sequences
2. pupils responding to teachers' directions
3. pupils listening to the teacher giving information

While it is true to say that conversations outside the classroom frequently have a three-part structure, speakers do not usually evaluate one another's performances. Just imagine how your friends or family members would feel if you were to evaluate their remarks all the time! Extract 8 is an example of a typical real-world exchange.

### Extract 8

- |   |    |                                      |     |
|---|----|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | A: | What's the last day of the month?    | I   |
| 2 | B: | Friday.                              | R   |
| 3 | A: | Friday. We'll invoice you on Friday. | F/I |
| 4 | B: | That would be brilliant.             | R   |
| 5 | A: | And fax it over to you.              | I   |
| 6 | B: | Er, well I'll come and get it.       | R   |
| 7 | A: | Okay.                                | F   |

In Extract 8, a business encounter, the interaction is opened by A in Line 1 with a question (I). B's response in line 2 is then confirmed by A in line 3 (F), followed by a second initiation by A ('we'll invoice you on Friday'). Note how this second initiation is not a question, but still requires some kind of a response, which B gives in line 4. Note, too, how, in everyday communication, the feedback move is optional. B's response in line 4 is followed by another initiation by A in line 5. (Although, it is also true to say that feedback does not always occur in classrooms, it is far more prevalent than in everyday exchanges outside the classroom. That is, most responses by learners receive some kind of feedback from the teacher). Going back to Extract 8, we see how the exchange concludes with a third tryadic exchange in lines 5–7, comprising an initiation by A (5), a response by B (6), and feedback by A (7).

In everyday settings, then, even the most simple, ordinary encounter such as a question and response often has three parts to it, and not two as people often think. It is also interesting to note that in the world outside the classroom, responses and follow-ups are not usually reactions to test-questions (speaker A is not testing speaker B on what

day it is, unlike the teacher, above, who was testing the learners' understanding), but show that the speakers have understood one another, and are satisfied with the way the interaction is progressing (*Friday/ that would be brilliant/ okay*).

For language teachers, understanding the structure of classroom interaction is very important because we teach discourse *through* discourse with our learners. This is another way of saying that in many parts of the world, the main exposure to the foreign language being taught is in the classroom itself, via the teacher. A number of studies have compared the discourse of the classroom with “real” communication (e.g., Nunan, 1987). But as van Lier (1988) says, “the classroom is part of the real world, just as much as the airport, the interviewing room, the chemical laboratory, the beach and so on” (p. 267).

From this brief introduction to the exchange structure of classrooms, we can make a number of important observations:

- All classroom discourse is goal-oriented. The responsibility for establishing goals and setting the agenda lies largely with the teacher. Pedagogic goals and the language used to achieve them are very closely related, even intertwined.
- The prime responsibility for what is said in the classroom lies with the teacher. Teachers control the discourse through the special power and authority they have, but also through their control of the discourse. They control who may speak and when, for how long, and on what topic. They control turn-taking through the use of IRF; not only do they initiate a response, they offer an evaluation—further evidence of control.
- Learners take their cues from the teacher and rarely initiate a response. Their role, one which they are socialised into from a very early age, is to answer questions, respond to prompts, and so on.
- The IRF sequence enables us to understand interaction in the classroom, and comprehend its special nature. An awareness of IRF enables us to consider how we might vary interaction more and introduce alternative types of sequence.

- An understanding of the IRF sequence enables us to model spoken language in the world outside the classroom, suggesting ways of constructing dialogues for teaching, role-plays for practicing conversation, and so on.

## REFLECTIVE BREAK

Think about your own teaching or classrooms where you have been a student.

- To what extent is interaction controlled by the use of IRF?
- How might you vary the interaction by using alternative types of interaction?

# 4

## Classroom Interaction and Teaching

In this chapter, I consider the relationship between classroom interaction and teaching. Second language teachers can do much to improve their professional practice and enhance learning by studying their own interactions with students. The starting point here is to consider how classroom contexts are created through interaction and to then identify how teachers might gain a closer understanding of specific features of the interaction. I then look at how teachers can create learning opportunities through their management of interaction. In the final section of the chapter, we look at specific ways in which a focus on classroom interaction can result in teacher development.

The perspective on context adopted here is a variable one which is shaped and changed by participants: teacher and students. This view of context highlights the importance of the interactions, emphasizing their specific shape or architecture (Seedhouse, 2004). It is only by looking in some detail at the interactions, I suggest, that we are able to gain the kind of up close, insider understandings needed to inform good practice. A detailed examination of classroom discourse reveals how interactants collectively co-construct meanings, how errors arise and are repaired, how turns begin, end, and are passed or seized. We can identify specific features of the discourse that help us to understand how teaching and learning are accomplished. Features like direct error correction, wait time, teacher echo, and display questions provide vital clues as to the ways in which “space for learning” (Walsh & Li, 2012) is either opened up or closed down. This kind of analysis can help us answer questions such as:

- To what extent do teachers include or exclude learners from the interaction?
- How are opportunities for learning created?
- Who holds the floor and for how long?
- What types of question are asked and how are they answered?
- How appropriate is the language to pedagogic goals?
- Which types of discourse promote student engagement and dialogue?

Perhaps more important, a fine-grained and detailed analysis of classroom contexts offers us unique insights into what is being taught and how, and what learners are learning. By looking at the moment-by-moment management of turns and topics, we can see, in the interaction, what is being learnt and what is not being learnt, and the relationship between what teachers teach and what learners learn. Our endeavour is not simply to describe classroom interaction; it is to develop new understandings and improve the ways in which we teach.

## Classroom Interaction and Opportunities for Learning

In this section, I present one extract of data as a means of showing how teachers can create opportunities for learning through their use of language and interactional resources (see Walsh, 2002, for a full version of this discussion). In the extract, the teacher maintains a high level of student participation and involves students in the kind of discussion that will create opportunities for learning. (Please note: It is not my intention here to evaluate the instructional skills of the teacher, merely to make the point that much can be done to improve teaching when we pay close attention to the way in which language is used.)

In Extract 9, there is clear evidence that the teacher, by controlled use of language and by matching pedagogic and linguistic goals, facilitates and promotes reformulation and clarification, leading to greater involvement and precision of language on the part of the learners. This extract comprises 6 preintermediate adult ESL students from Brazil, Japan, Korea, and Russia, and the teacher's stated aim is to provide oral

fluency practice using material from *Harrap's Intermediate Communication Games*.

**Extract 9**

- 1 L4: the good news is my sister who live in Korea send eh ...
- 2 T: SENT=
- 3 L4: =sent sent credit card to me=
- 4 T: =ooh very good news...
- 5 L4: but bad news [is]
- 6 T: [the bad] news is...
- 7 L4: I don't know password...
- 8 LL: /password/password/ (2)
- 9 L1: pin number=
- 10 T: =pin number...
- 11 L4: what?=  
12 T: =pin number pin number=
- 13 LL: =/ahh pin number/pen number/=
- 14 T: =pin PIN not pen pin =
- 15 LL: =/pin/pin number/p-i-n/=
- 16 L1: =I always forgot my pin number
- 17 L: =ah pin number=
- 18 T: =I don't know my pin number
- 19 L5: ((2)) she can phone you on mobile phone=  
20 T: =she can...
- 21 L5: she can say [you]
- 22 T: [she can]...
- 23 L5: she can tell your pin number ...
- 24 T: yeah she can [tell you your pin number]
- 25 L5: [she can tell you] this pin number by phone...
- 26 L4: but I I can't eh ring her because eh because eh the time eh=  
27 T: =the time difference?=  
28 L4: =time difference=
- 29 L5: =you can count your time for example look what what's the difference time  
30 with your country how many hours? (3)
- 31 L: eight hours=  
32 L5: =eight hours ok you can phone early in the morning it will be evening in your  
33 country=
- 34 L4: =if I go to home if ((5)) if I call her Korea it's eh [midnight]
- 35 L: [midnight]...
- 36 L5: ok you can phone in the morning ((3))=

- 37 L4: =yeah at [eight]  
 38 L5: [at eight] o'clock at nine o'clock you can call=  
 39 L6: =in Japan same=  
 40 T: =it's the same eight hours?=  
 41 L6: =yeah=  
 42 L4: =I'm very busy=  
 43 L5: =what you are busy it's eh just reason you [[[5]]]  
 44 L4: [[[4]]]=  
 45 T: =for god's sake give him a break (**laughter**)

In the 45 lines of text that make up Extract 9, there are several specific features of the teacher's use of language that facilitate learner involvement and create opportunities for learning.

### **Direct Repair**

Maximum economy is used when correcting errors, and the teacher opts for a very open and direct approach to error correction, as preferred by learners (Seedhouse, 1997). This is far less time consuming and intrusive than the more sensitive (and therefore time-consuming) error correction strategies preferred by many teachers. Errors are corrected quickly and directly (2, 6, 10, 14) and the discourse is allowed to flow with minimal interruption by the teacher. While I am not suggesting that all error correction should be direct and minimalist, there is a certain logic in keeping error correction to a minimum in oral fluency practice activities in order to reduce interruption and maintain the flow.

### **Content Feedback**

Many of the features of this extract mirror a naturally occurring conversation, and the teacher quite appropriately provides personal reactions to comments made by learners: reacting to a comment made (4) and making use of humour (45). Given that one of the teacher's stated aims is "to provide oral fluency practice," her use of conversational language is appropriate to her pedagogic purpose; language use and pedagogic purpose coincide. The teacher's use of language strongly resembles utterances found in the real world and reinforces the aim of promoting oral fluency. Appropriate use of conversational language creates an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and is likely to promote learner involvement. Feedback on the message rather than on

its form is also more conducive to genuine communication and is more appropriate in the setting outlined here.

### **Confirmation Checks**

Teachers who constantly seek clarification, check for confirmation, and do not always accept the first contribution a student offers are more likely to maximize learning potential than those who do not. In the above extract, the sole instance of the teacher checking for confirmation (40) does serve to maintain the flow and keep channels open. Here, a genuine question by the teacher not only facilitates a more interactive exchange, it ensures that learners are working together and that misunderstandings are minimised.

### **Extended Wait Time**

One of the most striking features of the extract is its turn-taking structure. As the discourse progresses, the teacher takes more and more of a “back seat” and hands over control to the learners. In lines 28–39 learners successfully manage the turn-taking and topic management themselves with no intervention by the teacher. Extended wait time, the time allowed by teachers to answer a question (see, e.g., Nunan, 1991), not only increases the number of learner responses, but it frequently results in more complex answers and leads to an increase in learner/learner interaction (see extract 4). Again, this teacher confirms the importance of maintaining harmony between language use and pedagogic aim; the teacher’s use of language, consciously or subconsciously, is very much in tune with her specific aim at this stage of the lesson.

### **Scaffolding**

Communication breakdown is a very common feature of L2 classrooms. Often it occurs because learners do not know a particular word or phrase or do not possess the appropriate communicative strategies. To preempt breakdown, it is the role of the teacher to intervene and feed in the missing language. Timing and sensitivity to learner needs are of utmost importance, and many teachers intervene too often or too early (see extract 2). Scaffolding (Bruner, 1991; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) simply refers to the language support provided by a teacher or another student. It involves more than simply error correction; it is a



skill similar to the one possessed by many parents when helping their young children struggling to find the right word at a given moment. It requires the ability to listen actively and make economical use of language. The examples in this extract illustrate this important practice very well: latched modelling (10 and 12), where the teacher quickly models the language needed at the end of a previous turn; alternative phrasing (18/497), where she offers a different way of saying something; prompting (25).

Of a total of 42 turns (30 made by learners, 12 by the teacher), 10 teacher contributions succeed (whether intentionally or not) in engaging learners and in promoting longer, more complex turns. Throughout much of the extract, there is clear evidence that the teacher's language use and pedagogic purpose are at one; that the teacher's stated goal of promoting oral fluency is consistent with her use of language. Her verbal behaviour allows learners to play a full and active role in the discourse, producing more complete, more natural responses. Instead of smoothing over the discourse and filling in the gaps by preempting learner responses, the teacher only intervenes as and when necessary, giving language support, correcting errors, or adding a personal comment of her own.

As far as the learner contributions are concerned, it is evident from this extract that learners and teacher are actively engaged in constructing a piece of discourse that, in many respects, resembles a conversation; this, again, coincides with the teacher's pedagogic goal and reaffirms the need for teachers to be in tune with their aims and use of language as the lesson unfolds. Throughout this piece, learners self-select (29–39), overlap (34/35, 37/38), and latch (15/16, 26/27, 28/29); these are all features that are common to naturally occurring conversation and add further weight to the coincidence of language use and pedagogic purpose.

What becomes apparent from this extract is that we cannot talk about the second language classroom context (singular); rather, we need to talk about contexts (plural) in which teachers and learners jointly construct the discourse. In Extract 9, the discourse is constantly shifting according to the changing agenda of the lesson and according to different participation structures. Successful teaching entails using linguistic and interactional resources that are fit for purpose, that

enable pedagogic goals and language use to coincide, and that take account of the changing nature of the discourse. Under this view of context, a quantitative view of teacher talking time is, to a large extent, redundant. What is more important is the *appropriateness* of language used in relation to the context of the moment and task in hand.

## REFLECTIVE BREAK

Think about your own teaching or classrooms where you have been a student.

- What do you now know about the role of classroom interaction in improving teaching and learning?
- What are the main ways in which an understanding of classroom discourse can be used in second language teacher development?

Any attempt to help teachers understand classroom discourse begins with noting that it is motivated, in the first instance, by a desire to enhance learning. While the very term “teacher talk” immediately conjures up images of teacher-centredness, most studies focusing on classroom interaction are motivated by a concern for the learners. The use of appropriate questioning strategies is designed to increase learner involvement, as is a concern to increase wait time. Essentially then, learners are central to and instrumental in the process of enhancing teachers’ awareness of language use in the L2 classroom.

A second theme that emerges from the discussion in this section is the importance to teacher development of teacher-generated data. Reflective practices are more easily accomplished when teachers analyse their own data, using recordings from their own lessons. Perhaps more importantly, we need to find ways of helping teachers analyse and interpret data without having to transcribe everything. Second language teacher development would benefit hugely from having teachers collect, analyse, and interpret data from their own classes.

A third theme that emerges is the need to acquire an insider perspective on classroom interaction. From a teacher development per-

spective, this means that any approach to helping teachers understand classroom discourse should use more than one method: for example, classroom recording with interview, lesson observation, plus focus group. True understandings of the complexities of classroom interaction can only be gained when we have as accurate a picture as possible of what is really happening—this entails using more than one type of data.

In this chapter, I have made a case for putting interaction at the centre of effective teaching, using the argument that interaction lies at the heart of effective classroom practice. By studying their own interactions with students, either recorded or recorded and transcribed, I suggest that teachers of ESL and EFL can do much to improve their professional practice and enhance learning and learning opportunities. By studying the specific interactional strategies they use, teachers can promote more active, engaged, and dialogic learning environments.

# 5

## Interaction for Language Teaching: Future Developments

From what we now know about classroom interaction, what are the challenges that lie ahead for both teachers and learners? In this brief overview, I suggest a number of directions for future developments.

One of the most striking and noteworthy observations about classroom interaction and language teaching is how little time is actually spent making language teachers aware of its importance. Most teacher education programmes, both pre- and in-service, pay very little attention to classroom interaction (Walsh 2006). Typically, most teacher education programmes offer some kind of subject-based preparation and training in classroom methodology; this model comprising two strands is used all over the world. I would like to see a third strand in teacher education programmes which deals specifically with interaction in the classroom. The aim is to highlight the importance of interaction to teaching and learning and to provide teachers with the means of acquiring close understandings of their local contexts. I suggest that classroom processes will only improve once teachers have the means of understanding local context and are able to improve it. Classroom interaction lies at the heart of this.

A second and related challenge for teachers is the need to acquire classroom interactional competence (CIC, Walsh 2013). When we analyze classroom transcripts, it is immediately obvious that levels of interactional competence vary hugely from one context to another and from one teacher to another. Some teachers, at some points in time, are very adept at managing interaction in such a way that learning and learning opportunities are maximised. Others use interactional strate-

gies that impede opportunities for learning (Walsh, 2002). Examples have been presented throughout this chapter in the various data extracts we have studied.

I define CIC as “teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning” (Walsh, 2013, p. 130). The assumption is that by first understanding and then extending CIC, there will be greater opportunities for learning: Enhanced CIC results in more learning-oriented interactions. Teachers demonstrate CIC in a number of ways. For example, ensuring that language use and pedagogic goals are working together is an important characteristic of CIC. As we have seen in some of the extracts presented here, teachers’ use of language and their goals must work together. Other features include the use of extended wait time (allowing a reasonable amount of time to elapse after asking a question and not interrupting students all the time) and extending learner responses (e.g., careful management of the interaction and paraphrasing a learner’s utterance). Similarly, teachers need to be able to help learners as and when needed by scaffolding a contribution, offering a key piece of vocabulary, or introducing a new phrase as and when needed. Achieving CIC will only happen if teachers are able to understand interactional processes and make changes to the ways in which they manage classroom interaction.

Other challenges facing teachers in the future is the need to gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between classroom methodologies and classroom interaction. A closer understanding of how interactional features operate in, for example, task-based learning, can only be of benefit to teachers and learners alike. How, for example, does task-type affect interaction, and what is the consequence for learning? How might more effective management of classroom interaction result in a more engaged, more dialogic type of learning? And what do we know of the importance of interaction during feedback following a task? There is much work to do in this area.

From a learner’s perspective, a number of challenges lie ahead. Perhaps the biggest and most difficult one is the need for learners to play a more equal role in classroom discourse. When we consider the ways in which learners are socialised into certain types of classroom behaviour, this is a huge challenge. In most content-based subjects, learners answer questions, respond to cues, follow the teacher’s initiative, avoid

interrupting, and so on. And yet, in a language classroom, a very different set of interactional traits is needed if learners are to play a more equal part in the discourse. In language classrooms, we need learners to both ask and answer questions, to interrupt where appropriate, to take the initiative, seize the floor, hold a turn, and so on. By following learnt behaviours that are the product of many years of being socialised into classroom rituals and practices, we may be facilitating the kind of “smooth” discourse profile that prevails at the moment. But are we helping to create interactions that result in language learning? I suggest that we need to encourage interactions that have a more “jagged” profile, in which learners play a more central role in co-constructing meanings and in ensuring that there are opportunities for negotiation, clarification, and the like. A jagged classroom interaction profile has more of the features that would be found in naturally occurring interactions such as everyday conversation and business encounters. Teachers would play a key role in making this possible.

## Summary

In this book, I have provided a brief sketch of some of the main features of L2 classroom discourse, considered how classroom interaction “works” in practice, and related this to actual teaching practices. I have also offered a brief outline of some of the likely future challenges facing teachers and learners in this area. My main goal is to help teachers gain a better understanding of the role of interaction in language teaching and learning and to make it one aspect of their professional development.

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# Appendix A: Transcription System

T	Teacher
L	Learner (not identified)
L1: L2: etc,	Identified learner
LL:	Several learners at once or the whole class
/ok/ok/ok/	Overlapping or simultaneous utterances by more than one learner
[do you understand?] [I see]	Overlap between teacher and learner
=	A latched turn: One speaker continues what another speaker was saying, without pausing.
(.)	Pause of one second or less
(4)	Silence; length given in seconds
((4))	A stretch of unintelligible speech with the length given in seconds
::	A colon after a vowel or a word is used to show that the sound is extended. The number of colons shows the length of the extension.
(hm, hh)	Onomatopoeic representations of the audible exhalation of air
.hh	An audible inhalation of air, for example, as a gasp. The more <i>hs</i> , the longer the in-breath

?	A question mark indicates that there is slightly rising intonation
.	A period indicates that there is slightly falling intonation
,	A comma indicates a continuation of tone
-	A dash indicates an abrupt cut off, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly
↑↓	Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is sharply rising or falling intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.
<u>Under</u>	Underlines indicate speaker emphasis on the underlined portion of the word
CAPS	Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalized portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speaker's normal volume
°	This indicates an utterance that is much softer than the normal speech of the speaker. This symbol will appear at the beginning and at the end of the utterance in question.
< >	Talk that is produced more slowly and deliberately than surrounding talk.
><	Talk that is produced more quickly than surrounding talk.
(would)	When a word appears in parentheses, it indicates that the transcriber has guessed as to what was said, because it was indecipherable on the tape. If the transcriber was unable to guess as to what was said, nothing appears within the parentheses.
<b>(T organises groups)</b>	Bold indicates the editor's comments

## Appendix B: Commentary on Personal Reflection 4

### Personal Reflection 4

Look at Extract 6. Comment on the teacher's error-correction strategy. How appropriate is it here where the teacher is trying to elicit student feelings and attitudes? What is the effect of the error correction on the interaction?

### Extract 6

- 1 T: ok does anyone agree with his statement?  
2 L2: (2) erm I am agree=  
3 T: = agree be careful with the verb to agree there you as well Ensa that it's WE  
4 agree it's not to be agree it's to agREE Ok=  
5 L2: [oh I agree]  
6 L: ((3))  
7 T: I agree with you but not I AM agree with you the verb is to agree ok so ((3)) to  
8 agree with (**writing on board**) is the preposition that follows it I so it's I agree  
9 with you I disagree with you ... ok em Silvie can you em what were you going  
10 to say?  
11 L2: I agree with you because em when when we talk about something em for  
12 Example you saw a ((2)) on TV=

The main issue here is that the teacher's use of language is at cross-purposes with her pedagogic goal. She claims to be focusing on oral fluency and is eliciting feelings and attitudes toward a statement made by another student in line 1. Following a 2-second pause (2), the student responds, using an incorrect verb form which is corrected at

length (3–4). The student (Silvie) acknowledges and then corrects her mistake (5), and the teacher then offers a repetition of the same explanation (7–9). Finally (9–10), the interaction is brought back on track, culminating in an extended learner turn (11–12).

Arguably, had the teacher offered a simple, short repair at the beginning of the exchange, or, indeed, said nothing, the flow of the interaction would not have been disturbed, allowing a longer and fuller student response. By minimising error correction during fluency work, there may be an increase in errors, but these can be dealt with at a later stage.

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