

**TURN-TAKING PATTERNS IN TEACHER'S  
TALK<sup>1</sup>**

**Betül ALTAŞ<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract**

Sociolinguists, social theorists and conversation analysts shed light on scaffolding the performance of social activities and the learner's interaction within cultures and social groups. The researchers have examined the sequences of interactional events in the classroom discourse analysis during 1960s and 1970s (Gee, 1999). On the basis of these researches, turn-taking and its patterns are examined in the conversational analysis, on the grounds that it is critical to thinking in SLA classrooms (Rymes, 2008, p. 155). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008), the nature of turn-taking in talk-in-interaction is essential in discourse analysis in relation to teaching and learning practices. In this regard, this study examines how different turn-taking patterns enhance the interaction in L2 classroom. Data obtained from each teacher were recorded to analyze an hour of teacher's talk. At this stage, transcripts of the sound recordings of three teacher's talk and frequency results were compared. The data results showed the types of sequences developed from the questions between teacher and student interactions. The main results of the study substantiated the view that discursive role of Feedback sequence in IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback sequence) is to develop a dialogue between the teacher and the students. The third sequence of IRF reformulation provided students with Feedback to interact so that they could co-construct another sequence. In this reformulation, teacher provided a scaffold for the students' interaction to share their own experiences and to enhance students' critical thinking in L2 classrooms.

**Key words:** *Turn-taking patterns, IRE, IRF, discourse analysis.*

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<sup>2</sup> Phd Cand., Çağ University, e-mail: [betulaltas1980@gmail.com](mailto:betulaltas1980@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Recent researches substantiate the view that sequences of classroom interactional events, concerning turn-taking and its patterns are prominent to examine in the classroom discourse analysis. Christie (2002) explains that turn-taking addresses the utterances, which are in the form of questions and answers (p. 2). In this regard, Rymes (2009) poses two critical questions about turn-taking, such as who asks the questions and what kind of sequence develops from the questions within the events between teacher and student. The analysis of turn-taking examines how different turn-taking patterns enhance the interaction in the classroom. In these interactional situations, Mehan (1985) addresses the IRE, which has a three part sequence, referred to as Initiation, Response and Evaluation. IRE sequence is different from the question sequences in daily life, because language is formed as correct or incorrect according to the teacher's standard, rather than as functional. Therefore, language is not composed of communication events concerning non-school life in which students try to stay engaged in interactions. Questions within IRE are categorized as known-answer questions, called test questions and display questions as well as open ended questions, regarded as authentic and information seeking. In contrast to known-answer questions, Nystrand (1997) mentions that open-ended questions bring about the discussions and interactions between teachers and students. However, known-answer questions in the IRE sequence might be considered as teacher-centered questions by the students, as these questions are not related to students' ideas or prior experiences. From this aspect, known-answer questions in the IRE sequence cannot reinforce classroom learning (Rymes, 2009, p. 163).

Wells (1986) adjusts the IRE to its new format, by changing the Evaluation to a generative feedback turn which refers to IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback sequence). In this regard, the third part of the sequence provides students with Feedback to interact so that students can co-construct another sequence. In this reformulation, the teacher provides a scaffold for the students' interaction to share their own experiences and to enhance students' critical thinking in L2 classrooms. Cullen (2002) mentions that discursive role of Feedback sequence in IRF, qualitatively distinguishes from its evaluative role, is both to enable the students to contribute and to incorporate them into the flow of the classroom discourse. The aim of this discursive role is to develop a dialogue between the teacher and the students. The IRF sequence is co-constructed with questions, which have a referential rather than a display function in which the teacher asks questions to elicit pre-determined answers.

Analyzing turn-taking patterns in the discourse analysis provides insights into understanding whose experiences are included, who holds the answers, who asks the questions and whose voice is silenced. Rymes (2009) makes a criticism, stating that "Known-answer questions position me comfortably as the seat of knowledge in my classroom. These formats are also easy to reproduce in the packaged test book series, to incorporate into gradable tests and standardized curricula that cleanly sort out the achievers from non-achievers" (P. 185). Therefore, this excluding is not the result of good learning and teaching, but of turn-taking patterns and habitual classroom procedures.

Drawing from the analysis of turn-taking patterns in the discourse analysis, I aimed to identify how different turn-taking patterns enhanced the interaction in L2 classroom. In the context of this study, discourse analysis was chosen. The decision to employ discourse analysis resulted from focusing on insights to turn-taking patterns in teacher's

talk in L2 classrooms, concerning the discovery of context characteristics. On the basis of this study conducted with participants, I aimed to answer the research question:

How do different turn-taking patterns enhance the interaction in L2 classroom?

**2. Method**

*2.1. Participants*

There were 3 participants, as English instructors in this research study, all teaching elementary level students at the Preparatory school of Çağ University. All 3 were female, native Turkish speakers numbered from T1 to T3 with 20 hours of English course lessons per week. In the context of the small-scale study, purposive sampling was selected.

*2.1.1. Data Collection and analysis*

A sound recorder was used during the interaction between teacher and student. Data obtained from each teacher were recorded to analyze an hour of teacher's talk. At this stage, transcripts of the sound recordings of 3 teacher's talk and frequency results were compared.

**3. Findings and Discussions**

This section identifies the key elements of turn-taking patterns in teacher's talk. The data results showed what kind of sequence developed from the questions within the situations between teacher and student with regard to turn-taking patterns used in the classroom discourse analysis. Each of the transcripts below was taken from sound recordings of 3 teachers' talk at Çağ University.

*3.1. Turn-taking patterns used in (T1) the first teacher's talk*

The first teacher asked her class of 25 students questions about the listening track on their course book, with regard to having meals with guests or family members as a cultural activity. The extract forms a chain of IRE and IRF exchanges, highlighted in bold face numbered E1 and F1.

Transcript

T1: Which subject did Carlos talk about?	I
S: Dinner on Fridays with guests.	R
T1 (E1): Especially, dinner on Fridays. Good.	E
.....	
T1: Do family members talk to each other a lot on Fridays?	I
S: No, because they are tired at the end of the week.	R
T1 (E2): Yes, because they are tired. Good.	E

The teacher began by asking the students quite straightforward known-answer questions which show the same evaluative role illustrated in the examples. In this regard, known-answer questions in teacher's talk were designed to check the students' comprehension. The strategy the teacher employed for E1 and E2 is the repetition of the student's contribution and praise. Cullen (2002) describes the repetition of individual student's

contributions as derogatorily echoing. In one sense, the teacher only acknowledges a student response and confirms it as acceptable (p. 125).

After the listening activities on the course book, T1 used some IRF sequences during the lesson when she asked students general questions, in reference to the topic, the meal times in Turkish culture. One of them is illustrated in the example.

Transcript

T1: What time do you have dinner? Is it quick or long?	I
S: When our guests come to our house, we have dinner for a long time.	R
T1 (F1): OK. Why do you have a long dinner?	F/I
S: Because, we always talk about family or life around the table.	R
T1: I also like having long dinners, because I like spending time with my family at the table.	F

According to Rymes (2008), the third turn provides insights into understanding the function of turn in teacher's talk. The third turn does not impede the sequence, but it provides Feedback for ongoing interaction. Rymes (2008) also adds that "Through the use of augmented third turn, a teacher does not simply supply a closed-ended evaluation, but a scaffold for the students' ongoing participation" (p. 164). In IRF sequence illustrated in the teacher's talk, T1 asked students an open-ended question. These kinds of open-ended questions aim to elicit personal responses which are related to a higher level of thinking.

### *3.1.1. Turn-taking patterns used in (T2) the second teacher's talk*

The second teacher began by asking her class of 24 students pre-reading questions on their course book, regarding the topic "exercising your brain". In this lesson, reading activity was integrated with student's speaking skill on the course book. The extract forms a chain of IRE and IRF exchanges, highlighted in bold face numbered E1 and F1.

Transcript

T2: How do you describe a healthy person?	I
S: Good life and fit body mean healthy.	R
T2 (E1): Good.	E

.....

After asking some pre-reading questions, T2 told them to open their books to look at the topic called "Exercising your brain."

T2: What do you do to exercise your brain?	I
S: I learn English.	R
T2 (E2): Good. If you learn English, this is good for your brain.	E

The teacher began by asking the students display questions, which showed the same evaluative role illustrated in the examples. In this regard, display questions in teacher's talk were used to elicit and measure the students' knowledge. The strategy the teacher employed for E1 was only to praise. However, the strategy the teacher employed for E2 was praise and additional comment to provide clues to a preferred response.

T2 used some IRF sequences during the lesson when she told students to read the article and find answers for the reading questions. One of them is illustrated in the example.

Transcript

T2: Why is it a good idea to chew gum?	I
S: t's important to make new memories.	R
T2: That's right. It exercises the hippocampus where new memories are formed.	F

In the third turn, the teacher rephrased the student's responses to a more acceptable form by building a class discussion for further interaction (Cullen, 2002, p. 122). Edwards and Mercer (1987) add that through the 'feedback' stage of I-R-F sequences, teacher also recasts what students say (p. 147).

### 3.1.2. Turn-taking patterns used in (T3) the third teacher's talk

The third teacher began by asking her class of 23 students speaking questions about the pictures on the relevant page. The extract forms a chain of IRE and IRF exchanges, highlighted in bold face numbered E1 and F1.

Transcript

T3: What is the first picture about or what is the woman doing there?	I
S:She's talking on the phone.	R
T3 (E1): OK. She's talking on the phone.	E

Rymes (2009) mentions that "In talking through pictures in a story book, for example, the IRE sequence can also serve to focus students' attention on the same details (p. 160). In addition, the strategy the teacher employed for E1 was the repetition of the student's contribution and praise.

Afterwards, T3 continued to ask questions about the pictures. She used IRF sequences during the lesson when she went on asking some of the students questions about the pictures. Some of them are illustrated in the example.

Transcript

T3: What are these people doing in the third picture?	I
S: They're greeting each other.	R
T3 (F1): How do they greet each other?	F/I
S: They say "hi and how are you?"	R
T3: Yes, they also say "hi and how are you?" to start a conversation.	F

The students read three conversations related to those pictures on the relevant pages. T3 told her students that there were some highlighted expressions to start and to finish a conversation.

Transcript

T3: How are things?	I
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- S: Fine, thanks. R  
 T3 (F2): What does the expressions "how are things?" mean? F/I  
 S: It is about health. R  
 T3: Perfect, you are right. The expression is used to ask how you are. F

In F1 and F2, the third turn provides Feedback for ongoing interaction. T3 does not simply supply a closed-ended evaluation, but a scaffold for the students' ongoing participation to share ideas about starting conversation expressions in English.

Transcript

- T3: What else do you say when you start a conversation ? I  
 S: Have you got a moment? or Are you doing anything now? R  
 T3(F3):Whatelse? F/I  
 S: Have you got time for a chat? and I haven't seen you for a long time. R  
 T3: Yes, correct. F

In F3, The third turn provides Feedback for ongoing interaction between teacher and student. T3 does not simply supply a closed-ended evaluation, but encourages the student for an ongoing participation.

### 3.2. Analysis of the Frequency results of IRE and IRF in teachers' talk

Table 1.

*Frequency and Percentage of IRE and IRF*

	<i>IRE</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>IRF</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>TOTAL IRE/IRF</i>
T1	16	76	5	24	21
T2	16	72	6	27	22
T3	3	21	11	78	14

Data results obtained from teacher's talk revealed that T1 and T2 used more IRE sequences in their turn-taking. According to table 1, T3 was much more efficient than T1 and T2 in using IRF sequences. Data results obtained from the highest frequency and percentage in IRF showed that students were the most active in interaction due to the role of Feedback sequence in IRF, provided by T3. The transcript of teacher's talk between T3 and students also revealed that Feedback sequence of IRF was qualitatively distinguished from its evaluative role. This enabled the students to contribute and to incorporate them into the flow of classroom discourse. In comparison to data results of T3, the IRF percentages in T1 and T2 were similarly low in conjunction with the less frequent use of IRF sequences in their talks. Similarly, the high IRE percentages of T1 and T2 showed that interactions with their students were much more teacher-centered, because T1 and T2 used more IRE sequences. Based on the data results compared with transcripts, the frequency and percentage of IRE which were high in T1 and T2 revealed that questions in each teacher's talk were used to elicit and measure the students'

knowledge as well as comprehension. In light of the data results obtained from the frequency and percentage of IRF which were highest in T3 showed that the third sequence of IRF reformulation provided students with Feedback to interact so that they could co-construct another sequence. In this reformulation, T3 provided a scaffold for the students' interaction to share their own experiences and to enhance students' critical thinking in L2 classrooms.

#### 4. Conclusion

Discourse analysis offers insights into understanding how turn-taking is organized, who asks most questions, and who does the most talking in L2 classrooms. In traditional classrooms, turn-taking unfolds in a teacher centered sequence. At this point, IRE sequence, which is considered as an authority pattern in reference to the teacher centered sequence, fails to provide students opportunities with interaction. Rymes (2009) says that:

Unfortunate fallout from an abundance of IRE sequences is that language in classrooms can start to be constructed as "correct" or "incorrect" exclusively (and according to teacher's standard), rather than functional or non-functional in a larger world of communication in which all our students are learning to participate. (p. 159)

In comparison to IRE sequence constructed by the teacher, the IRF sequence raises interactional awareness. Through the use of the third turn in the IRF sequence, the teacher provides a scaffold for students' interaction. The Feedback in the third turn of IRF can transform simple praise (evaluation) and repetition into a more interactive talk. Based on this information, students whose teacher used high IRF sequence were active learners, not passive in reference to IRF data results in teacher's talk. Sert and Seedhouse (2011) underline the importance of the reinitiation of the IRF sequence and the teacher's organization of ongoing interactions with students. As to Schegloff (1992), this ongoing engagement between students and teacher leads to a convergence between sender and receiver in L2 classrooms. Based on this study, habituated classroom sequences like IRE may restrict learning for the students who are familiar with IRE sequences. Turn-taking, asking and answering questions and providing feedback, which play an important role in recent research regarding discourse analysis, are the core components in order to form a more intellectual environment in L2 classrooms.

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