RAPPORT-BUILDING STRATEGIES:

SNAPSHOTS FROM SAUDI EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This case study reports the motivational strategies that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers use to actively engage their students in classroom discussions. It is a small-scale study that focuses particularly on rapport-building strategies. Discourse analysis studies that investigate the effects of teacher-sourced motivational strategies and the relationship of this strategy type to the quality of EFL classroom interaction are scarce. The majority of the available studies on the teaching of motivational strategies have examined the topic by means of quantitative observational measures and/or surveys. Some qualitative or mixed-approach studies have employed interviews, but there has been no demonstration of teachers' motivational practices from the stance of classroom discourse analysis. This study addresses this limitation by demonstrating the rapport-building practices of three EFL teachers of different nationalities (Saudi, Pakistani, and British), all of whom were teaching at the same Saudi college. The data was collected from EFL classrooms. The analysis of the audio-recorded lessons was conducted according to the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology. The rapport-building strategies that have been identified in this paper are empathy, humour, and the act of encouraging pairs of students to join in whole-classroom discussions. It is hoped that this study will help EFL teachers to reflect on their rapport-building strategies with the aim of promoting interactive learning.

Keywords: classroom interaction, discourse analysis, EFL, rapport-building, teachers' motivational strategies.

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Introduction

The phrase 'teacher's motivational strategies' refers to the use of classroom techniques by teachers which are used to motivate their students (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). There are a variety of motivational strategies that can be used in EFL classrooms. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) summarised teaching motivational strategies in a study that generated what is called the '10 commandments'. These commandments are as follows:

1) The teacher should be a role model for their pupils.

2) They should create a safe learning environment.

3) It is important to hand out tasks in a thoughtful way.

4) Teachers and pupils should have a positive relationship.

5) Teachers should improv their pupils' self-esteem.

6) Teachers should create interesting lessons.

7) It is important to raise pupils' awareness about how they can affect their own learning.

8) Language lessons should be made more personal.

9) It is important to set goals.

10) Students should obtain knowledge about the cultures where the target language is spoken.

The focus of this study is the fourth commandment: 'Teachers and pupils should have a positive relationship.' Based on his interviews with both teachers and students, Kassing (2011) found that the teacher–student relationship is the most effective motivational strategy. Brown (1994) suggested guidelines for creating rapport with students in a language classroom. He recommended that teachers should seek to build rapport with their students by: (1) appreciating individual students, (2) giving feedback on the students' progress, (3) encouraging the students to reveal their feelings and thoughts, (4) acknowledging their students' contributions, (5) sharing humour without ridiculing them, (6) emphasising the values of team work, and (7) praising the students' successes. From a theoretical point, learning is promoted through learners' social interaction with others. Such interaction would not happen without creating a friendly environment where learners feel relaxed and take part in meaningful learning. The concept of social interaction is originated with the socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky (1978) defines learning as the creation of meaning through social interaction. In the EFL classroom, this theory can be interpreted by the cooperation between the teacher and the learners and the cooperation among the learners themselves in order to construct a meaningful learning experience.

Providing teachers with models of teaching practices could facilitate increased implementation of rapport-building as a motivational strategy. Such models should be based on classroom evidence rather than pure theory. This highlights the importance of examining those classroom interactions that can reveal more about the teacher–student relationship. Investigation of classroom interaction has been highly encouraged by pioneering figures in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, such as Walsh (2002) and Seedhouse (2005). Teacher talk plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of learners' output in the classroom. In order to create a space for participation, teachers can shape learners' contributions, give feedback, ask questions, and provide evaluative comments (Walsh, 2002). For this reason, teachers are highly encouraged to reflect on their use of language in the classroom. Walsh (2006) suggests that language

teachers should follow the SETT (Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk) framework in order to evaluate and reflect on their classroom discourse and improve their teaching practices. With regard to the methodological analysis of classroom interaction, CA methodology is argued to be a more appropriate way of understanding classroom discourse than the quantitative methodologies of discourse analysis (Walsh, 2006). More discussions on the use of CA are presented in the Methodology section.

Examining rapport-building in real contexts by looking at teacher–student interactions has not received much attention in previous studies. There have been a few studies that have highlighted the role of rapport in increasing the quality of classroom discussions in foreign language classrooms. For example, Nguyen (2007) examined how rapport was factored into classroom instructions when teachers were giving feedback, calling for the students' attention, and summarising tasks. Another study by Park (2016) identified empathy, humour, and invitation of individual participation as the rapport-building strategies used in a Korean foreign language classroom. Jawhar and Alnofaie (2016) examined how a positive teacher–student relationship could lead to more interactive discussions in an EFL classroom.

Generally speaking, studying teacher-based motivational strategies from a qualitative discourse analysis perspective is a new area of investigation. Studies that have employed discourse analysis for the purposes of exploring these strategies—more specifically, rapport-building strategy—are limited (Alnofaie, 2016; Jawhar and Alnofaie, 2016; Nguyen, 2007). The majority of available studies have approached the issue of motivational strategies from a quantitative stand (i.e., observational measures and/or surveys) (Alqahtani, 2016; Alrabai, 2016; Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). Otherwise, there have only been mixed-approach studies which have employed interviews and surveys together (Astuti, 2016; Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). This limitation with literature forms the rationale of this study. The main contribution of this study is that it extends literature on teacher motivational practices by providing EFL teachers with research-informed models for practicing rapport-building strategy in EFL classrooms. It focusses on how rapport-building strategy was employed by three EFL teachers in a Saudi Arabian context, using a research methodology that is not widely used for investigating this issue (i.e., CA methodology). The research questions of this study are:

- What are the rapport-building strategies used by the three teachers?

- To what extent did the rapport-building strategies used by the three teachers affect learners' engagement in classroom discussions?

The following section provides details on the methodology of the study.

Methodology

Study Design

The design of this study is case study which is a common research design in the field of language learning and teaching. It is widely used for investigating natural phenomena occuring in real classroom contextsts (Yin, 2009). The aim of this study is identifying the teachers' motivational strategies for building rapport with their students. In order to reach an in-depth understanding of this issue, the study employed the qualitative methodology (i.e., discourse analysis of classroom interaction) and focused on the practices of three EFL teachers. The following paragraphs will explain the participants, instrumentation and the procedures followed for conducting this study.

Participants

The participating teachers were of different nationalities. There was a Saudi teacher who had been teaching EFL for three years, a British teacher who had been teaching EFL for seven years, and a Pakistani teacher who had been teaching EFL for twenty years. The teachers have been working at the same college in Saudi Arabia. They had also previously taught EFL at different Saudi Arabian institutes. The participating students were all in their first year of college, studying General English as a compulsory module. They were between the age of 18 and 21.

Instrumentation

The analysis of the discourse data was structured and dictated according to CA methodology. CA methodology provides details on how human interactions in daily-life situations occur in order to convey a message or to solve an issue, including with the use of verbal and non-verbal languages (Have, 1999). Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) define CA as the study of 'recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction... [to] discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus being on how sequences of actions are generated'. The data of this study was transcribed using Jefferson's CA conventions (Jefferson, 2004). These revealed micro-features within the recorded interactions, such as intonations, pauses, interruptions, overlapping, and more (see Appendix A for the transcription conventions). The author transcribed the lessons and read the transcripts regularly in order to identify relevant turns by participants. It is worth noting here that one reason why data transcription is time consuming is that researchers need to repeat the recordings in order to add the conventions and then identify themes related to their research questions. The analysis and interpretation of data included in this paper were presented at an international conference on English teaching for validation. For ethical purposes, the college name and the identities of the teachers and learners were kept anonymous. A random letter from each participant's name was chosen to represent her turn in the transcript.

Procedures

Data presented in this study come from a corpus of 25 audio-recorded EFL lessons that date back to 2011. All the lessons were audio-recorded between February 2011 and May 2011 and were transcribed by the author. Video-recording was avoided because it was not the preferred data collection option for the majority of the (Saudi) female students. Data were mainly collected for the author's use. The purpose of collecting this corpus was to examine the different aspects of EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context. This paper uses the illustrations of three extracts from the lessons of each of the three teachers. Each recorded lesson lasted 50 minutes. The digital audio-recorders used were of high quality and were placed in the middle of the classroom to ensure clear recording. It should be noted here that audio-recording can be problematic as sounds are more likely to overlap. Researchers are advised to back up data by using more than one recorder. The results and discussions are presented in the next section.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analyses of the classroom interactions of the three participating EFL teachers. The strategies will be demonstrated as they have been used by the teachers.

Empathy

The extract below is taken from a lesson by the British teacher, who had been teaching EFL for seven years. The lesson was about analysing a picture of a family sitting in an

airport and looking sad (see Appendix B.1 for the full lesson). The students were required to guess the family's story. At the end of the lesson, the teacher extended the conversation and asked the students if they had ever encountered a similar situation.

Extract 1

	148	T:	↑o:kay (.) have any of you been in a
	149		situation like [this]
	150	L:	[yea]
	151	T:	You ↑have when? (.) We have million (.)
	152		You? =
→	153	L:	= yea befo:re two years (.)
	154	T:	Hmmmm
→	155	L:	I: a wa I was going to London (2.0)
	156	T:	Yea
→	157	L:	and: (.) the airport was cancelled
	158	T:	here in Jed[dah] or: yea
	159	L:	[yea].
	160		a: I: (.) was waiting from nine pm
	161		(0.3)to three am
	162	T:	in the airport?=
	163	L:	in the airport=
→	164	T:	Oh my gosh
	165	L	[and a:]
→	166	M:	[↑wo:a] (An Arabic exclamation) (Ar. xxxx)
	167	T:	9 pm until three:::
	168	L:	Am
→	169	T:	↑that's not so ↓much
	170	L:	not so much yea but: a in the:: [>airport<] (.)
	171	M:	[in the:]airport
	172	L:	Yea
	173	M:	it's a: (hhh) lot (hhhhh)((laughter))
	174	T:	Yea
	175		((Talk continues))
	177	T:	and what happened in the end?
	178	L:	a::ha they ↑cancelled a: [the (.)] flight=
	179	T:	[oo:h!]

→	180	M:	=(**Ar**. **yaah**! , tr. ooh!)]
→	181	T:	[so you could n't go?

In this extract, L talks to the class about her experience in the airport when her flight was cancelled (lines 153, 155, and 157). The teacher expresses her empathy in line 164— 'Oh my gosh'. This statement of empathy by the teacher encourages the student to extend her turn within the discussion (line 165), although she is then interrupted by another student (M) who explains her surprise in a self-selected turn (lines 166). This is followed by the teacher's turn of confirmation (line 167). The discussion continues between the teacher and the two students (lines 169–180), with the teacher expressing her empathy again in line 179, followed by another empathy expression in Arabic by M (line 180). Using Arabic expressions when the teacher is an English native speaker might indicate that the interaction is natural. These sequential turns by the teacher and the two students demonstrate their engagement in the discussion. This point confirms Park's (2016) view of empathy as being an effective strategy for building rapport in the classroom.

Humour

The lesson presented in this extract was based on a mystery story, in which two lovers have been found dead and it is not clear whether they were killed or committed suicide (see Appendix B.2). The students were asked to think about what might have happened to the lovers. The lesson was taught by the Saudi teacher, who had been teaching EFL for three years.

Extract 2

	82	T:	↑Ok would you like to add anything any comment
	83		((Silence))
→	84	T:	I like to ma:rry a murderer
→	85		((Laughs))
	86	T:	Yes, I will be popular
	87		((Laughs))
→	88	J:	Teacher hehe I see TV show about how people meet in
	89		different places(.) One lady met someone at
	90		prison=
	91	T:	=Really

During classroom discussions, the students provided different interpretations of what had happened to the two lovers. Some of the students suggested that the man had killed the woman and then killed himself. Towards the end of this task, the teacher asks the students if they have any more comments (line 82). In line 84, the teacher breaks the classroom silence by telling her students that she wants to marry a murderer to become popular. J initiates a turn in line 88 (without being assigned by the teacher) to tell the class about a strange TV show that she had seen. Self-selecting their turn indicates an ease or fluency of conversation as it moves away from the traditional classroom discourse pattern of IRF (Initiate-Response-Feedback). This finding supports the findings drawn

from other studies which show that humour can facilitate the creation of a friendly atmosphere in the classroom (Nguyen, 2007; Park, 2016).

Inviting the Students' Contributions

The extract below presents a discussion based on a comparison task. The students needed to decide in groups whether they would prefer to spend their holiday in Paris or Dubai, and to give reasons for their selected choice (see Appendix B.3).

Extract 3

	400	T:	=> don't speak out of turn (.)if fashion
	401		shows in Dubai and you have fashion shows in (.)
	402		P:aris (.) ↑what is the <u>diffe</u>rence (.) why do you
	403		prefer (.) Dubai: to (.)<u>Paris</u>? (.) What is your
	404		difference (.) why do you like it bett:er?
	405	S:	It's smaller
	406	T:	Yes (?)
	407		((students talk in Arabic))
	408	T:	Not in Arabic yes come on
			((overlaps))
	409	T:	Shh:::: ((taps desk))
	410	R:	Teacher teacher listen we don't have specific
	411		reason for that.
→	412	T:	Ok [N] You were telling her something why: the
	413		fashion in D:ubai how is it different from
	414		P:aris:?
→	415	N:	Better
	416	T:	Why: do you like it bett↓:er because it is not
	417		(.2) more (.)
→	418	B:	°Traditional°

419	T:	↑Yes it is more <u>traditional</u> it is more <u>cultural</u>
420		(?) more adaptable to you: (.) okay
→ 421	N:	Like our country
422	T:	It should be culturally (writing on board)

In this extract, the teacher asks the students why they would prefer to spend a holiday in Dubai rather than in Paris. The teacher heard a parellel discussion going on between N and B and so asks them to share their answer (line 412). This strategy of inviting the other pairs' participation in the general classroom talk encourages the two students N and B to take turns in clarifying their point. N responds to the teacher's invitation in line (415), followed by an expansive turn from B (line 418), and then another building turn by N (line 421). The point in this extract is that inviting the pair's to contribute to the general class discussion could give students the feeling that their views are valued by the teacher. This can lead to a more interactive talk, and is a strategy that has been highlighted by Park (2016).

As revealed in these extracts, the qualitative analysis of classroom interaction is a helpful approach for understanding how teachers use rapport-building strategies and how the learners react to these strategies. The qualitative analysis of classroom interactions leads to a more in-depth understanding of classroom practices than quantitative approaches, however. In addition, the analyses of the data show that creating rapport in the EFL classroom can motivate students and encourage them to initiate and extend their contributions (Jawhar and Alnofaie, 2016). The role of teachers' motivational practices in extending students' turn-taking has been acknowledged in some studies (Alnofaie, 2016). The three motivational strategies for building rapport identified here have been highlighted in other discourse studies that discuss the strategy of rapport-building in different foreign language teaching contexts (Nguyen, 2007; Park, 2016). The present study comes as a reduplication of existing studies on rapport-building strategies in a new context, Saudi Arabia. Altoguh there are a plethora of studies that have examined EFL classroom interaction from different aspects of teaching and learning, there is still a lack of studies on how rapport-building strategies can be practiced in the classroom effectively. Another contribution of this study is that it shows some teaching model practices of the aforementioned strategies, recommended earlier by educationalists (Brown, 1994), and how the are implemented by teachers of different backgrounds.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper has discussed the use of rapport-building as a motivational strategy by three experienced EFL teachers. Looking at classroom discourse in three different classrooms at a Saudi college, three different ways of building rapport with students have been identified: empathy, humour, and the invitation of conversing pairs to join the wider classroom discussion. Such strategies have led to extended and naturally occurring turns. The study reported in this chapter is an extension of other researchers' efforts into analysing rapport-building strategies in foreign language classrooms. From a methodological perspective, the findings and summarised literature in this chapter reveal the usefulness of CA methodology in explaining the aspects of teaching and learning in EFL classrooms. However, research conducted into teachers' motivational practices from a qualitative analysis perspective is still limited. For this reason, future research needs to

explore the applicability of the diverse motivational practices used in different contexts and to identify the challenges that might inhibit their application.

It is hoped that the examples of rapport-building strategies discussed in this chapter will inform the practices of EFL teachers. Also, language teachers are encouraged to reflect on their use of rapport-building strategies by looking at data from their own classrooms and exploring their own use of other types of motivational strategies. Such reflective practices will draw repertoires of pedagogies for the benefit of EFL classrooms worldwide.

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Appendix A: CA Transcription Conventions

The CA transcription conventions are based on the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson, 2004).

[ ] Overlapping talk

= 'Latched' or nearly overlapping turns at talk

( ) Transcription of questionable or inaudible talk

(( )) Transcriber's description

(0.6) Intervals between utterances, timed in tenths of a second

(.) Very brief untimed intervals of silence

- An abruptly ended or 'cut off' utterance

: or :: Stretched sounds or syllables

. Cascading intonation that rises at the beginning and falls at the end

 of an utterance

 (not necessarily the end of a sentence)

, Cascading but continuing intonation (not necessarily the end of

clause or phrase)

? Rising intonation (not necessarily indicative of a question)

¿ Rising intonation within a continuing utterance, not as pronounced

 as ?

Rise in pitch (e.g., shrill voice)

↑↓ Rising or falling intonation (after an utterance)

CAPS Talk that is louder than surrounding talk

Talk that is quieter than surrounding talk

> < Talk said more quickly than surrounding talk

< > Talk said more slowly than surrounding talk

·h Inhalation

h Exhalation

$ Smile voice

~ Shaky voice

Appendix B.1: Describing feelings

Task type: Image reading

Task instruction:

A photo of a sad family waiting at the airport is presented on a PowerPoint slide.

Q: Describe the feelings of the people in the picture.

....
....
....
....

Post-task phase:

Q: Relate this activity to your personal experience.

....
....
....
....
....

Appendix B.2: Married to a murderer

Task type: Mystery

Task instruction : Listen to the story and answer the two questions on the task sheet.

Why did Danielle marry Clay?

 Who killed Clay?

Post-task phase:

Q: What have you learned from this task?

....
....
....
....
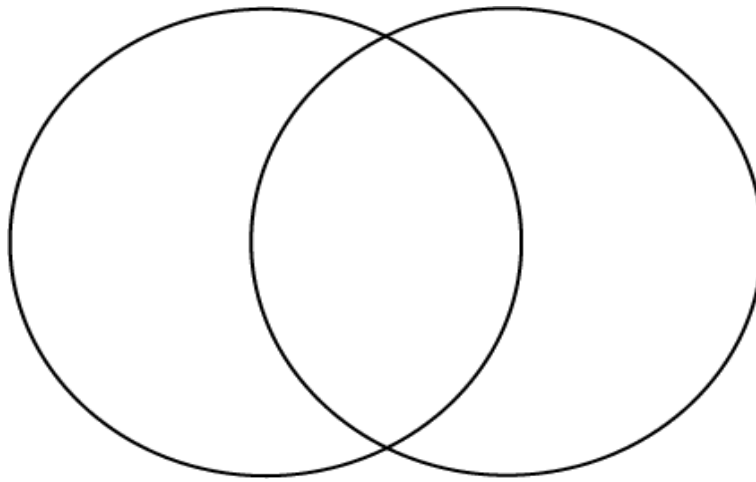...

Appendix B.3: Dubai or Paris?

Task type: Image reading

Task instruction:

You have pictures of Paris and Dubai, which are both popular tourist destinations. In groups, look at the pictures and discuss the similarities and differences between these two tourist cities. Use the Venn diagram.

Venn diagram

Decide in your group whether you would prefer to visit Paris or Dubai this summer. Explain why.

....
....
....
....
....

Post-task phase:

Q: How do you solve disagreements with others?

....
....
....
....
....