Relationship between Students' Responses and Teacher's Feedback Strategies

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Abstract

This paper investigates how teachers use feedback strategies to respond to different kinds of students' responses in a pre-reading stage of a lesson. The data was taken from three micro-teaching sessions taught by novice teachers. The feedback strategies framework suggested by Richards and Lockhart (1994) was used to analyze the teachers' feedback. The findings suggest a complicated relationship between students' responses and teachers' feedback. The teachers used one to four feedback strategies to deal with the students' responses. A combination of feedback strategies used, however, seemed to lead to imbalanced turns in the IRF patterns of classroom interaction. Discussion and implications on the nature of teachers' feedback and students' responses are highlighted.

1. Introduction

In a typical language classroom, a picture of a teacher standing in front of the class interacting and giving comments on students' utterances is very common. As a part of the interaction, the teacher often simply says "Right. Well done!" or "Are you sure?" or "Umm… Maybe!" or "That's not quite right. Try again." This ordinary part of the classroom interaction, however, is not as trivial as it seems to appear, as these statements provide 'feedback' or useful information fed back to learners to be aware of the quality of their performance, which is the basic step required for learning improvement. A teacher's feedback is, therefore, a vital part of cultivating students' learning.

Feedback motivates students to make progress in their learning. It allows students to reflect upon their performance and see the effectiveness of their language use because, as Arends (1989: 380) points out, "Without knowledge of results, practice is of little value to students." Knowing the results of their practice makes students be well-informed about the level of their success, and this encourages them to advance and/or find ways to work on their weaknesses, so teachers' feedback enables students to monitor their learning.

Feedback is considered a significant component of classroom interaction (Chaudron, 1988). This part of classroom discourse usually occurs when the teacher asks a question, a student gives an answer, and then the teacher provides a follow-up statement to the answer. This three-move exchange is commonly known as an IRF pattern which consists of Initiation, Response, and Follow-up, or feedback moves (Ur, 1991; Sinclair and Brazil, 1982; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975).

As the IRF pattern constitutes a vital part of classroom learning, these immediate constituents invite research to unveil the causal relationship between the moves. Pantakod (2010), for example, revealed a strong relationship between initiation and response moves, explaining that they were interrelated. Although students' responses were clearly dependent upon teachers' initiation, teachers' questions were, in fact, determined by 'expected responses'. Teachers tended to use questions that helped elicit responses they expected to get from learners. Pantakod's study, however, focused only on the first two moves in the exchange. He suggested further investigation on the relationship between feedback and responses, an area which has not been thoroughly explored.

Kaoropthai (2005) explored the use of feedback strategies in the classroom, focusing on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice in giving feedback. The findings revealed that only some of the feedback strategies used by the teachers matched their beliefs. In practice, obstacles arose and unexpected situations occurred so teachers could not apply the strategies they intended to use. Apart from their beliefs, teachers' feedback might be influenced by many factors. One main factor seemed to be the students' responses, as the two moves in the exchange are immediate constituents. Therefore, it is interesting to further investigate these moves focusing on the relationship between teacher's feedback and students' responses.

This study aims to cast more light on how teachers give feedback to different types of students' responses. It is expected to clarify the relationship between these immediate constituents to answer the research question, "How do students' responses lead to teachers' feedback?" The types of teachers' feedback strategies would be matched with different responses from students to identify common patterns that tended to co-occur. The finding is expected to be useful for teacher trainees in terms of awareness on making a decision to give feedback and how to deal with students' responses.

2. Literature review

2.1 Students' responses

A response generally appears as a second move of the three-move exchange of classroom interaction (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Cullen, 2002). It happens after the teacher asks a question. A student's response is usually a reaction to the teacher's question (Sinclair and Brazil, 1982). Responses could be in various forms. They could be non-verbal or verbal. Students may respond to teachers' questions by being silent, nodding, raising hands or using other gestures. These non-verbal behaviours provide useful feedback to teachers about their teaching. Most gestures are very clear and explicit, while silence is likely to be ambiguous. It may imply either clear understanding or total confusion. In spite of its implicit nature, silence accounts for a large portion of students' responses in class. Tsui (1995) found that about 40 percent of secondary ESL teachers' questions received no response from students. Similarly, Thongmark's (2002) and Pantakod's (2010) studies in Thai university contexts pointed towards an occurrence of a number of silent responses in students' reactions to teacher's initiations. Thongmark (2002)

further explained that the absence of students' responses seemed to be influenced by factors ranging from not understanding the teachers' questions to the pace of the teachers' questions, limited world knowledge and language knowledge, as well as unfavorable attitudes towards English.

Verbal responses also provide a lot of meaningful information to teachers. Verbal responses may range from a single word to long sentences. McMurrey (2010 cited in Pantakod, 2010) classified them into lexical (word level), phrasal (phrase level), and sentence (sentence or clause level) groups. These different levels of responses require different levels of cognition and linguistic competence from students. The longer the responses, the higher the competence demanded. The number and quality of these responses thus reflect students' knowledge, language ability and/ or problems they may encounter.

Verbal responses can also be classified according to contents into answers and diversions (Sinclair and Brazil, 1982). Answers can be further grouped into 'correct answers', 'tentative answers', and 'incorrect answers'. Diversions are verbal responses which show that students pay attention to the teacher's questions but they do not catch the questions, do not understand or do not know the answer, so they ask for clarification or reveal their opposition. For example:

      T: What is your least favorite subject?
      S: What do you mean by "least favorite subject"?

All kinds of answers and diversions help teachers know more about students' levels of language proficiency, what they know and do not know, as well as whether they understand or do not understand the lessons (Watson Todd, 1997). At a macro level, students' responses provide useful information for teachers to make an important decision in their teaching on whether they should move on to the next lesson, provide a remedial action or repeat the whole lesson. Students' responses, therefore, help teachers to improve their teaching in areas where students have difficulties and adjust the lesson to effectively achieve the learning goals. At a micro level, students' responses provide useful information for teachers to immediately and appropriately react to the students or to provide instant feedback to students.

2.2 Teachers' feedback

Feedback is defined as information fed back to individuals about the appropriateness of their actions or responses (Watson Todd, 1997). In class, teachers can provide this useful information in any forms of communication to inform students about the quantity or quality of their performance in a learning situation (Cole and Chan, 1987). A teacher's feedback generally functions as a follow-up or an evaluation move in the IRF pattern of classroom discourse. It assists students in evaluating their performance, provides corrections for imperfect utterances, asks for clarification, praises perfect rendition, or simply acknowledges the answers by giving backchannel cues such as 'Mmm' (Ellis, 1985).

Feedback is an important component in the learning process. "The learner needs to be told or shown how he is learning, to receive a judgment from a teacher on his performance" (Sinclair and Brazil, 1982: 44). Students need to check the adequacy of their performance and monitor their learning progress as these are decisive steps for effective learning (Cole and Chan, 1987; Watson Todd, 1997). Teachers' feedback carries information for learners to advance their learning through the process of reflecting upon how well they have performed, analyzing their weaknesses, and improving learning based on their own reflection or suggestion obtained from the feedback. The quality of teachers' feedback, therefore, affects students' learning. It guides students' thinking and can lead to autonomy (Lewis, 2002) if the cycle of reflecting, analyzing and improving learning is highlighted so as to fortify the process of learning.

Teachers' feedback also provides intrinsic motivation to students' learning (Lewis, 2002). It drives students to improve themselves, as success usually brings further success. When students get positive and constructive feedback from teachers, their self-efficacy can be reinforced, and this encourages further improvement (Williams and Burden, 1997). Moreover, knowing how well they perform can be more motivating than marks or grades as it is more informative. Teachers' feedback and appropriate suggestions can encourage students to use language to the best of their ability.

Teachers can use different kinds of feedback to deal with students' responses. They can select from a range of, for example, positive or negative feedback, reinforcement or punishment, intended or non-intended feedback, evaluative or non-evaluative feedback, verbal or non-verbal feedback, intrinsic or extrinsic feedback, corrective or indicative feedback, and immediate or delayed feedback (Cole and Chan, 1987; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). These different forms of feedback contribute to learning in different ways as they are suitable for different purposes and situations. For instance, even though immediate feedback is considered more effective, it may interrupt class activities and affect students' motivation (Watson Todd, 1997), so the teacher may consider delayed feedback instead. Corrective feedback can help students get the right answers immediately. It, however, may limit students' opportunities to do self-correction.

Therefore, in order to provide effective feedback to students, teachers need to make a critical decision concerning the choices of appropriate feedback. From literature on pedagogy, general guidelines are suggested for teachers, for example, to provide specific feedback to learners, to focus on critical points, and to give feedback that is appropriate to students' level and needs, and not loaded with metalinguistic terms, etc. (Watson Todd, 1997).

Moreover, teachers need to know strategies for applying feedback to students' responses. The following strategies are suggested by Richards and Lockhart (1994).
- *Acknowledging a correct answer*. (Responding by saying, for example, "Yes" or "Right" to show that the teacher hears the answer and it is correct.)
- *Indicating an incorrect answer*. (Signaling to students that the answer is incorrect saying, for example, "No, that's not quite right." *Repeating*. (Echoing the student's answer.)

- *Expanding or modifying an answer.* (Responding to an answer by providing more information.)
- *Asking follow-up questions.* (Asking students to clarify the answer.)
- *Summarizing.* (Paraphrasing or concluding students' responses.)
- *Praising.* (Complimenting students, for example, by saying "Good" or "Excellent.")
- *Criticizing.* (Commenting on the responses.)

Other feedback strategies include motivating and encouraging students to take part in the interactions, using gestures and other non-verbal communication to indicate errors, and transferring responsibility for feedback to peers (Arends, 1989).

These guidelines on feedback strategies are comprehensive and useful for teachers. They clearly suggest how teachers could react to different kinds of students' responses. However, in a real classroom situation, teachers may face situations where they are required to make an abrupt, on-the-spot decision. Moreover, the relationship between teachers' feedback and students' responses might not be simple, and it requires critical decisions from teachers, as discussed earlier. This might be the reason why 'zero feedback' is also noticed in a classroom (Kaoropthai, 2005). Zero feedback is a situation when a teacher intentionally or unintentionally decides not to give any feedback to students' responses. Zero feedback (either intentional or non-intentional) does not inform students of the correctness or incorrectness of their answers and may lead to students' confusion or uncertainty about their performance; this, in turn, may limit learning (Cole and Chan, 1987). Issues on how teachers actually give feedback to students' responses are, therefore, worth investigating and would contribute to better insights into the relationship between these two immediate constituents of classroom discourse.

3. Research procedures
The study focuses on feedback strategies that teachers used to give feedback to different types of students' responses. The data was collected from three micro teaching classes taught by three teacher trainees. The classes aimed at the teaching of reading. Only the pre-teaching stages of the lessons were selected for analysis, as this part of the lesson aims at contextualizing and activating students' background knowledge relevant to the text. Thus, it generally invited teachers to use different kinds of questions as initiations to elicit responses from students. Richness of interactions was, thus, expected.

A video recording was used to record the subjects' classroom interaction. The three subjects were asked for permission to record their lessons in a natural teaching setting. The interactions that occurred during the pre-teaching stages of each subject, which lasted from 9 to 15 minutes, were then transcribed verbatim. The students' responses were classified into answers (correct, tentative, and incorrect answers) and diversions based on Sinclair and Brazil's (1982) framework, as this framework is comprehensive and it could be used to analyze both contents and the language of the students' responses. Non-verbal responses (such as nodding, and head

shaking) as well as silence or zero responses were also taken into consideration and grouped under 'others'. However, because of the unclear nature of non-verbal behaviours, only silence or zero responses were presented in the study. The teachers' feedback strategies were classified based on Richards and Lockhart's (1994) categories into: *Acknowledging a correct answer, Indicating an incorrect answer, Repeating, Expanding or modifying a student's answer, Asking follow-up questions, Praising, Summarizing, and Criticizing*. This framework was selected for the analysis due to its practical nature, and it covered common feedback strategies for classroom teaching. However, the framework focused primarily on verbal feedback. The researcher, thus, decided to include non-verbal strategies and strategies that might be identified but did not match the main categories in 'others'. The frequencies of the responses and the feedback strategies were calculated. Data about students' responses and teachers' feedback strategies was also compared to see the relationship between these constituents in the interaction.

4. Findings

4.1 Numbers and types of students' responses

Within 9-15 minutes of the pre-teaching stage, the students from the three classes provided a total of 67 responses as illustrated in Table 1. The total numbers of responses from these classes were not much different. There were 17, 23, and 27 responses from the students from the three classes.

Table 1: Students' responses during the pre-teaching stage

Students' responses		Numbers of responses			Total	Percentage
		Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3		
Answers	correct	12	14	12	38	56.72
	tentative	8	5	0	13	19.40
	incorrect	4	2	1	7	10.45
Diversions		1	0	0	1	1.49
Others (Zero responses or silence)		2	2	4	8	11.94
Total		27	23	17	67	100

Most of the responses were 'answers' (86.57%) where the majority was 'correct' (56.72%). Tentative answers accounted for 19.40%, while incorrect answers were 10.45%. Noticeably, most of these answers were short and limited to the word level rather than phrases or sentences. In Extract 1, for example, the teacher used a picture to elicit students' responses, and the answer obtained was simply a single-word response, 'hacking'. The nature of this type of students' response seemed to affect the teachers' use of feedback strategies, and this will be discussed in more detail later.

T: What is he doing? *(The teacher shows a picture of a hacker.)*
S: Hacking.

<div align="right">*(Extract 1: Subject 1)*</div>

In this study, diversions occurred only once in one class, when a student asked the teacher to repeat the question, as he could not clearly understand it, as shown in Extract 2.

T: What kind of data is there in your computer that you love to keep and watch alone?
S: Again, please.
T: What kind of data do you have in your computer?

<div align="right">*(Extract 2: Subject 1)*</div>

Silence, which was grouped under the 'others' category, was noticed eight times (11.94%), suggesting that some questions from the teachers did not receive any response from the students. This lack of responses will be further investigated with the feedback that the teachers provided to react to such instances.

4.2 Numbers and types of teachers' feedback strategies

Table 2 shows that the total number of teachers' feedback from the three classes was 123. During this short period of the pre-teaching stage, each subject's feedback varied slightly, from 35, to 44 and 51 times. They employed four types of feedback strategies (acknowledging a correct answer, repeating, expanding or modifying an answer, and praising) listed in the analysis framework and three other strategies, namely, giving zero feedback (13 times), providing a correct answer (4 times), and repeating the question (1 time).

Table 2: Teachers' feedback strategies

Teachers' feedback strategies	No. of teachers' feedback			Total	Percentages (%)
	S 1	**S 2**	**S 3**		
1. Acknowledging a correct answer	9	15	5	**29**	23.58
2. Indicating an incorrect answer	0	0	0	**0**	0
3. Repeating students' responses	12	14	9	**35**	28.46
4. Expanding / modifying an answer	12	11	9	**32**	26.02
5. Asking follow-up questions	0	0	0	**0**	0
6. Praising	3	4	2	**9**	7.32
7. Summarizing	0	0	0	**0**	0
8. Criticizing	0	0	0	**0**	0
9. Others (i.e. Zero feedback, Providing answers, Repeating questions)	8	4	6	**18**	14.63
Total	**44**	**51**	**35**	**123**	100

Repeating students' responses, expanding or modifying an answer, and acknowledging a correct answer were the top three strategies that the subjects used, and they were used at similar frequencies (35, 32 and 29 times, respectively). Noticeably, the subjects did not make any use of 'indicating an incorrect answer', 'asking follow-up questions', 'summarizing', or 'criticizing'. 'Praising', however, was noticed at a low frequency (9 times).

Comparing the numbers of feedback and the students' responses, it can be clearly seen that the teachers' feedback outnumbered the students' responses. This implied that the subjects used more than one feedback strategy with one response. The relationship between these two immediate constituents is illustrated in the following section.

4.3 Relationship between students' responses and teachers' feedback
Since the majority of students' responses were answers, which were classified into correct, tentative and incorrect answers, the teachers' feedback used with these three kinds of answers is summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Feedback strategies used with answers

Feedback strategies	No. of feedback		
	Correct	**Tentative**	**Incorrect**
Repeating students' responses	30	4	1
Acknowledging a correct answer	24	5	0
Expanding or modifying answers	17	14	1
Praising	4	4	0
Giving zero feedback	3	0	3
Providing a correct answer	0	0	3

1) Correct answers
It seems that the subjects dealt with correct answers most frequently by repeating and acknowledging the answers (30 and 24 times, respectively), and many of the correct answers (17) were modified. Moreover, a combination of feedback strategies was noticed with a single response. These feedback strategies of the teachers might be influenced by the nature of students' answers which were quite short and seemed to be limited to word levels.

> T: When we talk about chocolate what do we think of?
> S: Sweet.
> T: Sweet, yes. Sweet is the taste of chocolate, but sometimes you may feel like it's a little bit bitter.

(Extract 3: Subject 3)

Extract 3 shows that Subject 3 used three feedback strategies with one response: namely, repeating ("Sweet"), acknowledging ("yes"), and expanding or modifying a student's answer ("Sweet is the taste of chocolate, but sometimes you may feel like it's a little bit bitter."). The subject modified the answer to add more information in order to cover what she expected to elicit from the students. Pantakod (2010) noticed similar instances in the teachers' talk, concluding that teachers' expectations determined the discourse.

Moreover, it was observed that for each pair of responses and feedback constituents, the subjects would employ up to four feedback strategies with a single response from the student. Extract 4 provides an example of the use of four feedback strategies with one correct answer.

> T: Anything else do you think of?
> S: Ocean, underwater.
> T: Ocean, underwater. Yes. Very good. Other locations can be in the forest, in town, etc.
>
> *(Extract 4: Subject 2)*

From Extract 4, the teacher repeated the student's answer ("Ocean, underwater"), acknowledged the answer ("yes"), praised the students ("very good"), and expanded the answer, talking about other possible locations. Similar to Subject 3, Subject 2 elaborated on the students' answer to cover the information he expected to elicit in the initial initiation.

Noticeably, repeating was very often used as the first feedback strategy for dealing with correct answers. This might be because echoing students' answers seems to be a simple and natural reaction for teachers. It also helps teachers to buy more thinking time before moving on with the next move. After that, the teacher may acknowledge that the answer was correct, or praise the students for their good performance, and/or modify the answer.

> *2) Tentative answers*

As for tentative answers, the subjects used the strategy of expanding or modifying the answers the most (14 occurrences). Acknowledging, repeating, and praising were also used (5, 4, and 4 times, respectively). Moreover, a combination of these feedback strategies was noticed as seen in Extracts 5 and 6.

> T: Sleeping… what? *(The teacher attempted to elicit the words, 'sleeping beauty'.)*
> S: Sleeping princess.
> T: It is close. Good try. Actually the story is "Sleeping Beauty".
>
> *(Extract 5: Subject 2)*

> T: What will happen if a virus gets into your computer?
> S: Com hang.
> T: Hang! Computer hang! You mean your files will be damaged. The virus will damage or destroy your files.
>
> *(Extract 6: Subject 1)*

In Extract 5, Subject 2 intended to elicit the answer 'sleeping beauty' from the students. However, the student did not supply the exact answer, so he acknowledged that the answer was close to the correct answer, praised the student for the attempt, and modified the answer. Extract 6 reveals a similar instance where the teacher repeated a student's tentative answer before modifying it. Noticeably, teachers' feedback strategies used with correct and tentative answers were similar.

3) Incorrect answers

Although incorrect answers occurred only a few times in the study, interestingly, the subjects tended to ignore them or provided zero feedback to these answers, as can be seen in Extract 7 below.

> T: How often did you use it (a computer)?
> S: Through night long.
> T: Ø (The teacher did not say anything and moved on to other questions.)
>
> *(Extract 7: Subject 2)*

Another feedback strategy that the subjects used with incorrect responses seemed to be providing a correct answer to the students, and it was usually found as a single strategy, not accompanied by other feedback strategies. Extract 8 below illustrates the use of this feedback strategy with an incorrect answer.

> T: What does it (clue) mean?
> Ss: คำตอบ (Answers)
> T: 'Clue' here means something that helps you find out the answer.
>
> *(Extract 8: Subject 3)*

4) Diversion

In this study, a diversion response occurred only once. This response from a student occurred when he did not understand the teacher's question and asked for a repetition of the question from the teacher. The teacher, thus, repeated the question by paraphrasing it to deal with the response.

> T: What kind of data in your computer do you love to keep and watch alone?
> S: Again please.
> T: What kind of data do you have in your computer?
>
> *(Extract 9: Subject 1)*

5) Zero responses

Noticeably, zero responses or silence occurred 8 times, and five of these silent responses received no reaction or zero feedback from the teachers. The teachers ignored the old question and moved on to the next question. For the other three silent reactions, the subject himself provided the answer (1 time), repeated the question (1 time), and provided an incomplete sentence as a hint (1 time).

5. Discussion and implications

The findings indicate that the subjects used a few feedback strategies to react to students' responses in the pre-teaching stage. Three main feedback strategies, namely, repeating students' responses, acknowledging correct answers, and expanding or modifying students' answers, were employed most frequently, while indicating an incorrect answer, asking follow-up questions, summarizing, and criticizing were not observed. A number of instances of zero feedback were also noticed. Moreover, it was noted that a combination of feedback strategies was used with one response. These main findings lead to the discussion on four main points below.

5.1 Most common feedback strategies. Unsurprisingly, the most common feedback strategies were repeating, acknowledging, and expanding or modifying students' answers. Repeating or echoing and acknowledging the answers perform an important function of classroom discourse (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). They share the same functions of accepting the answer and informing the students that the teacher has heard and is attending to the response the student produced. Repeating and acknowledging students' answers are considered neutral or non-evaluative (Cole and Chan, 1987). They are, thus, unthreatening, and this might explain why they seemed to be the most common feedback strategies of teachers.

Expanding or modifying students' responses was also used quite often in the study. This might be because the function of this feedback strategy perfectly matches the teacher's role as a resource. Teachers usually play important roles in providing explanations to clarify students' understanding, and giving information that contributes to students' learning.

However, in spite of its advantages in providing useful input and language exposure for learners, extending students' responses could cause negative effects on language learning. Since teachers are usually in a powerful position in a classroom discourse and commonly have more information, longer turns in the interaction are produced. Moreover, students' responses are comparatively short. In this study, for example, most of the responses were noticed to be at the word level. The teachers, therefore, attempted to extend the answers. This leads to an imbalance in the power relationship and makes classroom discourse unique, full of IRF patterns, and with a higher proportion of teacher talk time (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). A good balance of teachers' and students' communication time in relation to appropriate use of feedback strategies is, therefore, complicated and demands careful attention from teachers.

Interestingly, all of the feedback noticed in the study focused on content, and not the form of the language. This part of the finding might be influenced by the nature of the pre-reading stage of the lesson, where the aim of teaching is to contextualize and to activate students' background knowledge before reading. Moreover, it could be noticed that when mistakes occurred, the subjects corrected them without explicitly pointing out the language problems to students, as the focus was on content (e.g. SS: "Com hang." T: "You mean the files will be damaged.") The subjects seemed to be primarily focused on the purposes of the pre-reading stage.

5.2 Unpopular feedback strategies. Surprisingly, indicating an incorrect answer, asking follow-up questions, summarizing, and criticizing were not observed in the study. Students' incorrect answers tended to be ignored by the subjects, who were novice teachers. This might be because these answers did not match their expectations. Novice teachers are likely to attend to expected responses that help them proceed to the next stage. This non-intended feedback (ignoring the incorrect or unexpected answers as wrongly interpreted by learners) may lead to negative effects such as de-motivation or feelings of discouragement in learners (Williams and Burden, 1997). Moreover, non-learning and false learning may occur as students do not get adequate information to guide their further development.

As for asking follow-up questions, teachers need to be trained and encouraged to use this technique more, as it is an important communication skill which helps make a classroom discourse become more natural, meaningful, genuine, and communicative (Cullen, 1998). Asking follow-up questions shows that the teacher is really interested in the content of the interaction (not simply focusing on the lesson plan) and helps elicit more responses from students. These, in turn, help balance teacher and student power relationship as teachers' power could be shared by students while communicating ideas. Moreover, when a genuine conversation occurs, students' talk time would be increased. A student-centred feature and favorable class atmosphere could then be achieved as well.

5.3 Zero feedback and zero responses. A small number of zero feedback and zero responses was also noticed in this study. As discussed earlier, zero feedback does not carry information fed back to learners, so they do not receive adequate information to reflect upon their performance. This lack of feedback limits learning. On top of it, when zero feedback is matched with zero responses, a silence period occurs. Silence, however, is not simply a vacuum. It carries meaninful information to teachers and can be interpreted differently ranging from confusion to negotiation of meaning, thinking time, and many others. Because of its unclear nature, silence could be a frustrating period especially for novice teachers so they should be well-trained on how to intepret students' zero responses or silence, how to cope with it, and how to use wait-time or elicitation techniques (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Silence responses, therefore, need careful attention from teachers.

5.4 Nature of teachers' feedback and students' responses. In the study, an imbalance between the students' responses and teacher feedback was noticed. Most students' responses fell into the word level. Only some of the responses were at the phrasal or sentence levels. Pantakod (2010) and Dalton-Puffer (2006) also marked that students usually produced a large number of lexical responses which were very short and typically consisted of one word such as yes/no, a noun, or a verb. This might result from their low level of language proficiency and/or the nature of the teachers' questions or elicitation techniques. In this study, for example, sometimes the subjects used an incomplete sentence as a cue for students to fill in the missing word. This technique limits students' answers to a phrase or a word. A longer response from students could be promoted

or encouraged by the teacher's use of appropriate questioning (Dalton-Puffer, 2006). More use of divergent and referential questions to stimulate thinking, for example, should be taken into consideration (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).

In addition, a combination of feedback strategies used by the teachers clearly contributed to the length of teachers' turns. Up to four feedback strategies were used with a single response. The teachers acknowledged and repeated the response, praised the students, and also expanded or modified the answer. The length of the teacher's feedback stiffened the imbalance proportion of teacher and student interaction in the IRF pattern of classroom discourse. The I move seems to be in the form of a question or statement by a teacher, while the R is a word-level response from students. The F, on the other hand, appears to be in the form of a combination of feedback strategies building upon the R. The feedback move, thus, seems to be the longest and the most complicated part of the constituents.

This relationship between teachers' feedback and students' responses could be viewed in a positive and a negative way. On the bright side, the combination of feedback strategies used adds learning value to the discourse, providing information for learners to evaluate their responses and expansion of information, which directly contributes to effective learning. The IRF pattern is, thus, also known as the IRE or Initiation-Response-Evaluation pattern of interaction (Hall and Walsh, 2002).

On the contrary, the longer proportion of the F in the IRF pattern observed in this study reflects that classroom discourse is different from genuine communication discourse where IRF patterns rarely occur (Long and Sato, 1983). The length of the F move signals the need for measures to promote students' talk time and to introduce more genuine communication to classroom discourse. A teacher should sometimes move out of an uninterrupted IRF pattern and establish a more communicative interaction with learners (Waring, 2009). Teachers' feedback should be more open and varied, including communicative functions that allow students to initiate, negotiate and co-participate, not only to repeat or acknowledge the responses, but also to add information and/or to provide correct answers. Spoken discourse outside the classroom is complicated and rich, with a variety of communicative functions (Hoey, 1992).

The teachers' feedback strategies for incorrect answers should also be carefully considered. In this study, there were certain cases where the teachers tended to ignore the incorrect answers and sometimes supplied the correct answers too soon without showing attempts to use other strategies such as paraphrasing or repeating the question. Negotiation for meaning through requesting further clarification from students and opportunities for them to take a greater part in the interaction, thus, should be encouraged.

6. Conclusion

Since a teachers' feedback does not function simply to inform students of correct answers but also to clarify and consolidate learning, it should contain useful information, and be precise,

concise and thought-provoking for learners (Cole and Chan, 1987; Cullen, 1998). More emphasis, therefore, should be placed on how effectively teachers' feedback could contribute to learning and promote meaningful communicative interaction in a language class. Teachers, especially novices, should be trained on how to react to students' errors, correct and incorrect answers, as well as to other kinds of responses. These issues should be highlighted in teacher education.

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