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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
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**CLASSROOM INTERACTION ANALYSIS
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON
QUESTIONS**

BY

ALAWIA ABDEL MAHMOUD EL HASSAN

**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
MALAYSIA**

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ALAWIA ABDEL MAHMOUD EL HASSAN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF HUMAN SCIENCE IN ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE**

**KULLIYAH OF ISLAMIC REVEALED KNOWLEDGE
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ABSTRACT

One of the main forms of classroom is through questions. A number of studies shed some light on various aspects of questions such as the relationship between teacher question and students performance. However, they have not exhausted the subject especially in the language classrooms. The present study aims at identifying the type of question, questioning strategies, students response in relation to the type of questions and patterns of interaction. The study was conducted at the Language Centre the International Islamic University Malaysia. Two ESL teachers were observed for two classes each during their regular classes. Data was collected through video- tapes and field notes. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) system was chosen as a system for data collection and discourse analysis. Amy's (1985) system was used in analysing the data. The findings indicated that display questions are used more than genuine questions (54.8%). The questions were conditioned by the very nature of the topic area. As for questioning strategies, different kinds of strategies were used including rephrasing, provision of a clue, prompting and nomination. The overwhelming response generated by teacher questions were restricted rather than elaborated answers irrespective of the type of questions that elicited them, though genuine questions were found to be more productive than display questions in stimulating response from students. Initiations were mostly teacher initiations. An overwhelming number of student talk were a response to teacher questions. Among other suggestions, the study suggested that students should be encouraged to initiate communication by asking questions themselves.

ملخص البحث

تعد الأسئلة من الوسائل الرئيسية المؤدية إلى التفاعل بين المعلم والمتعلم. فقد تناولت هذه الدراسات نوعية الأسئلة والعلاقة بين أسئلة المعلم وإجابات الطلاب لها، ولكن الموضوع لم يُقتل ببحثاً بعد، خاصة في مجال تعليم اللغة. ترمي هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الآتي: نوعية الأسئلة، استراتيجية المعلم في طرح الأسئلة، إجابات المتعلمين على ضوء نوعية الأسئلة، نمط التفاعل بين المعلم والمتعلمين في الفصل. لقد أجريت هذه الدراسة في مركز اللغات في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. وتمت ملاحظة أستاذين في محاضراتهم المنتظمة العادية في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغة ثانية (في درسين لكل)، ثم جمعت المعلومات في أشرطة الفيديو إلى جانب مشاهدات الباحثة في العمل الميداني. اختيرت أنظمة سينكلير وكولثر د لجمع المعلومات ومنظمة آمي لتحليلها. وأشارت النتائج إلى أن أسئلة العرض أكثر استعمالاً من الأسئلة الحقيقية، طبيعة موضوع الدراسة تقيد نوع الأسئلة، أما فيما يختص باستراتيجية المعلم في طرح الأسئلة، فكلا المعلمين استخدمتا طرقاً مختلفة من بينها صياغة السؤال بصورة أخرى، الأسئلة الإيجابية الأسئلة التي تحت المتعلمين على فهم المقصود والاستجابة له أو بتعيين أحد الطلاب للإجابة على الأسئلة، غالبية إجابات الطلاب مقيدة وقصيرة بغض النظر عن نوعية الأسئلة، رغم أن الأسئلة الحقيقية أكثر فعالية من أسئلة العرض في تحفيز أو حث الطلاب على الإجابة، كانت الغالبية العظمى للأسئلة المطروحة من جانب المعلمين، ٢, ٨٨% من مشاركة الطلاب هي إجابات لأسئلة المعلم في العينة (أ) بينما نجدها أعلى من ذلك في العينة (ب) ٨, ٩٥%. ومن ضمن توصيات أخرى أوصت الدراسة بأهمية تشجيع الطلاب على الأخذ بزمام المبادرة في طرح الأسئلة بأنفسهم.

APPROVAL PAGE

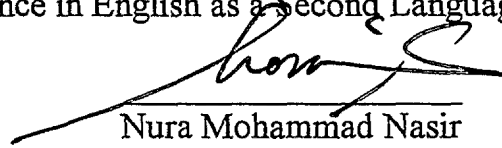
I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Science in English as a Second Language.



Nurairhan Mat Daud
Supervisor

Date: 28/11/2000

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Science in English as a Second Language.



Nura Mohammad Nasir
Examiner

Date: 28/11/2000

This thesis was submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature and is acceptable as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Science in English as a Second Language.



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This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Science in English as a Second Language.



Mohamad Aris Othman
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic
Revealed Knowledge
and Human Sciences

Date: 7/12/2000

Declaration Page

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: ALAWIA ABDELMAHMOUD EL HASSAN

Signature: *Alawia*

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Classroom Interaction Analysis with Particular Emphasis on Questions

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To

Mother, husband, and children with gratitude.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research

The quest for knowledge from its proper sources, namely divine knowledge and active reason, is the basic cause of the progress and development of the Ummah. The Quran explicitly encourages the quest for knowledge and education. The first revelation calls upon the Prophet and humanity to seek education and acquire knowledge in accordance with the divine guidance:

“Read (and comprehend) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher” (Quran 96:1)

Say “Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know. It is those who are enuded with understanding that receive admonition” (Quran 39: 9).

Most of our knowledge results from questions. Question asking is our most important intellectual tool. The Holy Quran encourages humans to use their intellectual faculties to acquire knowledge and to seek it from the well learned, then they may give thought.

“If ye realize this not, ask of those who possess the message”
(Quran 16:43; 21:7)

According to Ibn Shihab knowledge is a treasure to which questions are the keys.

If the source of knowledge (the teacher), does not know the answer to a question s/he could just say “Allahu aalam” because in Islam absolute knowledge is a divine characteristic.

Islam encourages learners to ask questions to seek knowledge. They should not be

shy to ask questions. According to an old saying, those who are shy and those who are arrogant will hardly learn. While "adab" with the instructor is highly appreciated in Islam, shyness to ask questions is not appreciated.

There are many different ways of asking questions and many different reasons for doing so. While teachers often plan their questions in terms of lesson content, they seem to place less emphasis on considering their questions in terms of cognitive and linguistic demands made on the learners. A teacher who emphasizes cognitive language learning, may ask tough questions in the hope that language use accompanied by cognitive work may result in more language development. However, tough questions may often be answered in a few words or not at all. Therefore, the amount of cognitive work is not directly measurable in terms of the amount of language production, and here a possible conflict arises for the teacher; whether to guide the learner to think more or produce more. The answer may be both, but how? In order to encourage productivity, the teacher may start with relatively easier questions; for example, asking questions that seek information about the students themselves or about their ideas. This type of question has an advantage of allowing learners to have some control over the input which may lead to increased motivation. Once comprehension and motivation are established, the teacher may move to high cognitive type of questions. High cognitive questions require the student to mentally manipulate bits of information previously learned to create an answer, or to support an answer with logically reasoned evidence. The options presumed to underline response to higher order questions paralleled to application and evaluation in Bloom's taxonomy (1956). They are related to the development of thinking skills and reasoning. They have more to do with the student's own response, the student's

knowledge of the world, inference and imagination (Winne 1979). These types of questions are referred to, in this study, as genuine questions, as opposed to display questions. A genuine question relates to a question to which the speaker does not already know the answer. It is an information-seeking type of question. The initiator is genuinely attempting to obtain information from the respondent. Searle (1969:69) refers to this type of question as a real question. A display question refers to a question to which the questioner already knows the answer. In asking a display question, the teacher does not seek an answer to resolve some doubt. Rather, his/her purpose is to make the student display some previously learned knowledge (Wu 1993:51). An example of this type of question is "What is the formula for a letter?" Brock (1986) says that questions at low cognitive levels, asking for factual recall or recognition are display questions. While questions calling for evaluation or judgement are likely to be referential (genuine).

Educators generally agree that teachers should emphasize the development of students' skills in critical thinking rather than in learning and recalling of facts (Aschner 1961; Hunkins 1966; Gall, 1970). However, research findings indicate that teachers pose recall questions more frequently. For example, Long and Sato (1983) and Morgan and Saxton (1991) found that ESL teachers used significantly fewer referential questions than display questions in the classrooms. All questions (excluding rhetorical questions) share a common function; to request for information. So when a teacher poses a question s/he expects an answer to that question. However, there are instances when learners provide no answer to teacher's questions. In such a case a teacher needs to use certain techniques in order to stimulate the students' response.

When a teacher gets no response to an elicitation, s/he can use other strategies. S/he may repeat the question or rephrase it. S/he can also use one or more of the acts-prompt, nomination and clue- to re-initiate. Prompt suggests that the teacher is no longer requesting a response, but expecting or even demanding it. Clue refers to the provision of additional information which may help the learner to answer. The function of nomination is to call on or give permission to a student to contribute to the discourse. (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). The original elicitation stands and these items are used as a second attempt to get a reply.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the questions and questioning strategies employed by English as a second language (ESL) teachers in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Centre for Language and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD). A case study will be employed for this purpose. The study is primarily based on data gathered from ESL classes, conducted in August 1998 semester 111, which is a short semester.

Background of the Study

At IIUM, English is taught as a second language as well as it is the medium of instruction. The University emphasizes the importance of acquiring language proficiency in English, which is important for everyone to enter into the world of contemporary science and technology as well as to engage in global communication and international relations. To that end, CELPAD has been given the major responsibility of upgrading the language proficiency of both local and international students.

The English Language Division, which has been in existence since May 1983, was

established with the aim of nurturing and bringing forth students who possess not only intellectual knowledge and spiritual strength, but also practical and workable experience (CELPAD booklet, '93-'95: 1).

The English Language Division caters to a range of students including those who received their education in a medium other than English, as well as those who have experienced varying degrees of English medium instruction. The programme meets the needs of Malaysian and international students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Undergraduate Prospectus 1998-99:33).

The English language teaching staff of CELPAD consists of both native and non-native speakers of English. They come from relatively heterogeneous backgrounds in terms of education and culture.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are to:

- 1-Identify the types of questions that teachers employ in the classroom discourse.
- 2- Investigate the strategies teachers adopt to stimulate students' response.
- 3- Identify the relationship between different types of teacher questions and certain features of students' responses.
- 4- Identify the patterns of classroom verbal interaction that emerge from the teacher-student exchanges.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1-What are the common types of questions posed by a teacher in the classroom?
(display vs. genuine question)

2-What kinds of strategies does a teacher adopt to make his/her questions more comprehensible and stimulate students' responses?

3-What kinds of responses are elicited by different types of teachers' questions?

4-What patterns emerge from the teacher -student interaction?

Significance of the Study

One important goal of classroom research is to find out how teachers make a difference. What teachers do in the classroom may bring about changes in students' behaviour and may relate to their achievement. In education, many institutions emphasize the need to develop citizens who are capable of independent thought and knowledge creation rather than mindless repetition of knowledge. This emphasis on thinking is reflected in second language (L2) education. A key strategy for prompting thinking is the use of questions. Questions are the predominant techniques for initiating, extending and controlling conversational exchanges in the classroom. Questions are also the key tools which L2 learners can use to engage in negotiation of meaning. Such negotiation has been shown to increase the amount of comprehensible input received and is thus seen as increasing language development because comprehensible input is believed to promote language acquisition.

This study may raise teachers' awareness of their questioning behaviour and technique and help to guide learners in the development of their critical and analytical thinking and promoting their language learning. In order to investigate these issues, one has to go inside the classroom. Progress in understanding language in the classroom is progress in linguistic theory.

Scope of the Study

In order to pursue the objectives defined above, classroom discourse, gathered from ESL pre-university classes at IIUM, has to be analyzed.

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter One is an introductory chapter. It states the problem under investigation, presents the objectives and the significance of the study. Chapter Two discusses some related studies conducted on questions. Chapter Three presents the design of the study: it describes the processes employed in the study as well as the procedures. Chapter Four gives the findings and a brief discussion of them in relation to the research questions. Chapter Five concludes the thesis with some implications for teaching and with a few suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Much research has been conducted on the role of questions in education generally. The studies describe the use of questions, their frequency, rate, type and their effect on learners' achievement (Romier 1912; Gall 1970; Dillon 1984; Guzman 1993). There is a general belief that teacher questions have an impact on quality and the quantity of student achievement. Gall (1970) labels this belief a truism. However, Dillon (1984) argues that research findings repeatedly present a pattern of inconsistent results.

In contrast to the few studies on questions in second language classrooms there is a substantial body of literature about the kinds of questions teachers ask in first language classrooms. The intellectual or cognitive level of questions is defined, in most first language studies, according to either Bloom's (1956) or Gallagher and Aschener's (1963) hierarchies. Both systems view the intellectual level of questions as ranging from those calling for the recognition or recall or factual information, which is the lowest level of the hierarchy, to those calling for evaluation or judgement, which is the highest.

In second language education, questions are seen as crucial to generating input and output. Brock (1986) in his study on the effect of referential questions on ESL classroom discourse, found that student spoken output was greater in teacher referential questions. Swain (1985) links output with second language acquisition

(SLA). That learners will develop by producing the target language more frequently and more correctly, follows the rather traditional notion that acquisition of a skill results from production practice of the skill:

One function of output is that it provides the opportunity for meaningful use of one's linguistic resource. Smith (1982) has argued that one learns to read by reading, and to write by writing. Similarly, it can be argued that one learns to speak by speaking.

(Swain 1985:248).

Questions are also the key tool which second language learners can use to engage in negotiation of meaning (Long, 1981 and 1983). Such negotiation of meaning has been shown to increase the amount of comprehensible input received (Gass and Varonis, 1985; Krashen 1985; Doughty and Pica, 1986; Pica et al 1987), and is thus seen as increasing language development because comprehensible input is believed to promote language acquisition.

Taking first language and second language studies together, five general types of empirical studies are reported by Mills et al (1980) and are noted below along with other related studies taken after 1980, such as Long and Sato (1983), Brock (1986), Guzman (1993) and Geoff (1997). The first group of studies presents useful background information on questions and the cognitive classification systems that were used to study questions (Gall, 1970; Brock, 1986; Geoff, 1997). The second group of studies investigates the relationship between the use of higher order questions and student answers (Gall, 1970; Guzman 1993). Studies in the third group investigate the relations between special instructional settings and the use of higher order questions (Tinsley, 1970; Chewprecha et al, 1986). Studies in the fourth group look at the effect of special training on increasing teachers' use of higher cognitive

questions (Brock, 1986; Ayaduray et al., 1997). Studies in the fifth group analyse the correspondence between teacher questions and students' responses (Mills et al, 1980).

First Group: Background Information on Questions

The first group of studies presents background information about questions and the cognitive classification systems that are used to study questions. Some of the most salient findings and recommendations from studies carried out by Clegg et al (1969), Davis and Tinsley (1969), Gall (1970 and 1973), Brock (1986), Long and Sato (1983), Geoff (1997) are:

1. Teacher questioning is the basic unit underlying classroom teaching.
2. Low- cognitive questions are employed more frequently by teachers.
3. Teachers should raise the intellectual levels of their questioning in order to foster higher intellectual thought in their students.
4. Cognitive classification seems useful as a training device for developing teacher questioning strategies that maintain higher cognitive levels.

In terms of questions categorisation, Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objective is still the most used resource for cognitive question types. In a meta-analysis on questions Redfield and Roudeau (1981) concluded that higher cognitive questions produce better educational results.

Mehan's (1979) classification of types of initiations is a practical alternative which is easier to handle, and useful. Mehan distinguishes three types of initiation: elicitation,

informative and directive. He then distinguishes four types of elicitation:

- ◆ Choice elicitation: Yes/no – or choice questions
- ◆ Product elicitation: requires a factual response.
- ◆ Process elicitation: asks for respondent's opinion or interpretation.
- ◆ Meta-process elicitation: asks students to be reflective about the process of making connections between elicitation and responses. (Mehan 1979: 45-46)

Early L2 researchers discriminated between “specific” and general questions (closed, open-ended) (Naiman et al, 1978 and Bialystock et al, 1978). Recently and with the growth of concern for communication in language classrooms, a further discrimination has been made between “display” and “referential” questions (Long and Sato 1983). Long and Sato (1983) found that ESL teachers used significantly fewer referential questions than display questions in the classroom in contrast with interaction between native and non-native conversation in the world outside which is dominated by referential questions.

It seems that Bailystock et al (1978) were the only researchers who found contrary results to Redfield and Rousseau (1981) and Brock (1986). In Bailystock et al's study, a comparison was made between core and immersion French teachers. The immersion teachers were found to use more general information referential questions. The implication is that the more language-oriented the classroom, the more the teacher finds it appropriate to elicit linguistically constrained student contributions in order to promote practice in language.