# Identification and Distribution of Interactional Contexts in EFL Classes: The Effect of Two Contextual Factors

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**Abstract**
This study aims at empirically furthering awareness of the organization of interaction in EFL classes. Informed by the methodological framework of conversation analysis, it draws upon a corpus of 52 three-hour naturally-occurring classroom interaction to identify classroom interactional contexts based on the structuring of the pedagogic goals in turn-taking sequences. Conversation analytic procedures were then paired with quantitative procedures to explore the distribution of the identified contexts within the macro-context of classroom discourse and to investigate the effect of interaction-external factors, i.e., teachers' training and learners' levels of language proficiency, on the distribution of the identified contexts. Analyses of extracts from the transcribed data led to the emergence of four interactional contexts: form-oriented, meaning-oriented, skill-oriented, and management-oriented. As to their distribution, form-oriented and skill-oriented contexts were found to be constitutive of the bulk of interaction, with meaning-oriented context comprising the smallest proportion. A two-way multivariate analysis of variance revealed that the distribution of all identified contexts was significantly affected by learners' levels of language proficiency. Teachers' training had a significant main effect on just form-oriented and management-oriented contexts. The findings of this study draw teachers and teacher educators' attention to the necessity of a change in the status quo of EFL classroom interaction.
**Keywords**: classroom interaction; conversation analysis; contextual factors; interactional contexts

## Introduction

Approaches to analyzing second language (L2) classroom interaction have yielded two different views on the nature of classroom context. Discourse analysis and interaction analysis see classroom as consisting of a single and static social context. As to conversation analysis (CA), however, teachers and learners tend to co-construct (plural) contexts through their talk-in-interaction in relation to the overall and the unfolding pedagogic goals of a lesson (Walsh, 2006). In this respect, an L2 classroom is considered as a dynamic and complex series of interrelated contexts.

Various attempts have been made by scholars and practitioners of the field to identify the contexts of classroom discourse (Jarvis & Robinson, 1997; Seedhouse, 2004; Van Lier, 1998; Walsh, 2006). A common thread that runs through all such attempts is that L2 classroom is goal- oriented and the teacher has the prime responsibility for establishing and shaping the discourse (Johnson, 1995). In recent years, a sizeable body of research has been undertaken into the nature of teachers' instructional practices in relation to learners' participation opportunities in each of the contexts. Within Seedhouse's (2004) framework, these studies have dealt with a variety of issues, including turn-taking in form and accuracy context (Waring, 2008), wait-time in meaning and fluency context (Yaqubi & Pourhaji, 2012), understanding-check questions in different contexts (Yaqubi & Karimpour, 2013), turn-allocation patterns in both form (accuracy) and meaning (fluency) contexts (Xie, 2011), interactional feedback in task-oriented context (Yousefi & Biria, 2011),use of L1 in the procedural context (Nation, 2003), to name only a few.

However, what seems to be underrepresented in the literature is the way these contexts are distributed in classroom interaction. The amount and quality of learner participation opportunities afforded by each of the contexts tend to vary. Therefore, teachers' management and awareness of the distribution of the interactional contexts can have a bearing on the facilitative role of interaction in second language acquisition. Moreover, conversation analysis, as the methodological framework of the previous studies, prevented

researchers from adopting an etic approach to interaction and investigating the factors residing outside interaction. This study pairs qualitative conversation analytic procedures with quantitative ones to draw a more detailed picture of EFL classroom interaction.

## Literature Review

Various approaches have been developed for understanding the 'interactional architecture' (Seedhouse, 2004) of the L2 classroom. Three of the major approaches documented in the literature are interaction analysis (IA), discourse analysis (DA), and conversation analysis (CA).

Due to the increasing concern for objectivity, reliability, and generalizability in the 1960s and 1970s, interaction analysis became popular and was widely used as a 'scientific' approach to analyzing interaction (Walsh, 2011). This quantitative approach entails a series of structured observation instruments or 'coding systems' (Chaudron, 1988) that enable the observer to record what happens in the classroom by ticking boxes next to some predetermined and fixed categories. One of the earliest studies that adopted IA was conducted by Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, and Smith (1966) in which they utilized a structured instrument to observe the interaction of 15 teachers and 345 students. They managed to identify common pedagogical moves in different teaching cycles, namely solicit, respond, and react. These three moves are now known as (IRF) initiation, response, and feedback (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) is another coding system developed by Flanders (1970) that assigns classroom interaction to predetermined categories of teacher and student talk. Although it has its own merits, IA has been criticized on several grounds. First, matching patterns of interaction to predetermined categories tends to predetermine the results and prevent the researcher from accounting for events not matching the descriptive categories (Van Lier, 1988). Secondly, it merely relies on the observer's interpretation of events. The observer is considered as 'an outsider looking on in events as they occur' (Long, 1983; cf. Walsh, 2006, p. 43). Therefore, the approach of IA is etic rather than emic. In other words, it excludes participants'

interpretations of events. Thirdly, it fails to account for some common features of classroom interaction such as overlaps and interruptions due to its underlying assumption that classroom discourse proceeds in a sequential manner and one speaker turn occurs at a time (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). Last but not least, it reduces the complexities of classroom interaction to some fixed categories because it looks at 'all varieties of L2 classroom interaction from a single perspective and according to a single set of criteria' (Seedhouse, 1996, p. 42). Even some of the main proponents of IA recognize that it provides a partial view of reality and thus call for another method of analysis. As Spada and Frohlich (1995) admit:

> if one is interested in undertaking a detailed discourse analysis of the conversational interactions between teachers and students, another method of coding and analyzing classroom data would be more appropriate. (p. 10)

The second approach is discourse analysis (DA) defined as the study of spoken or written texts. DA is guided by principles taken from structural-functional linguistics (Levinson, 1983). In other words, it focuses on words and utterances at supra-sentential level and aims at finding their functions in context (Walsh, 2011). For example, the interrogative structure 'Could you fetch a red marker?' might be interpreted as a request. DA has also been one of the major approaches to analyzing naturally-occurring interaction (Levinson, 1983; Seedhouse, 2004). Adopting DA approach to analyzing natural interaction in primary-school classrooms, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) identified and compiled a list of 22 speech acts representing the verbal behaviors of both teachers and students. The main limitation of this approach stems from its guiding principle, i.e. the establishment of relationship between structural patterns and functions; it is problematic owing to the issue of multi-functionality (Stubbs, 1983). An utterance may refer to a multitude of functions, particularly in classroom settings where patterns of interaction are complex due to various contextual factors at work such as role-relationships and sociolinguistic norms (Levinson, 1983). DA is both a simplistic and a reductionist approach to analyzing classroom interaction. It is simplistic because it aims at matching utterances to

functional categories, as if there exists a single static context, whereas in most cases no one-to-one correspondence exists between the two because of the multiplicity of contexts. It is reductionist since it reduces the complexities of classroom interaction and 'fails to adequately account for the dynamic nature of classroom interaction and the fact that it is socially constructed by its participants' (Walsh, 2006, p. 48).

Conversation analysis (CA), as the third approach, is 'the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p.14). With its root in ethnomethodology which studies methods people use for the production of social order (Garfinkel, 1967), CA focuses on how people use language in conversation as a means for social interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Its relevance to the study of L2 classroom interaction is not difficult to pin down. According to Walsh (2011), "CA attempts to account for the practices at work that enable participants in a conversation to make sense of the interaction and contribute to it" (p. 86). To this aim, it systematically examines both verbal and nonverbal features of talk including turn-taking organization, sequences, repairs, gesture, interruption, overlap, pause, and the like. As an approach to analyzing L2 classroom interaction, CA differs from the previously-mentioned approaches in two significant ways. First, unlike IA and DA, conversation analysis focuses on what emerges from the data (Seedhouse, 2004). It does not try to 'fit' the data to preconceived categories.CA attempts to 'let the data speak for themselves' by extracting categories from the data instead of imposing them on the data. Thus, it assumes an emic (or participants-relevant), rather than an etic (or researcher-relevant), perspective on analyzing classroom interaction. Secondly, whereas IA and DA view context as static to which fixed categories of talk can be imposed, CA considers it as dynamic and variable which is mutually constructed, shaped, and renewed by the participating learners and teacher in relation to goal-oriented activities (Heritage, 1997).Variations in the participants' agendas, expectations, objectives, social relationships, and use of language lead to the construction of locally-negotiated micro-contexts within a global context.

In spite of differences in terminologies, a number of scholars and practitioners have similarly focused on identifying the contexts of classroom interaction. Van Lier (1988) uses the term 'types of interaction', relates language use to activities, and identifies four types. Type 1, 'less topic-orientation, less activity-orientation', is typical of everyday conversation and allows the most freedom of self-expression because it is the least structured type of interaction. Type 2, 'more topic-orientation, less activity-orientation', occurs when information is provided in instruction or a lecture; there is little exchange of information and the interaction is monopolized by the teacher's monologue. Type 3, 'more topic-orientation, more activity-orientation, occurs when there exists a predetermined format for information exchange, as in an interview. Finally Type 4, 'less topic-orientation, more activity-orientation' occurs during substitution drills and activities with very specific procedures.

In another attempt, Jarvis and Robinson (1997) analyze the verbal interaction between teacher and pupils in primary-level EFL lessons and identify a focus-build-summarize structure to classroom interaction based on six pedagogic functions. They include (1) showing acceptance of pupils' utterances, (2) modeling language, (3) giving clues, (4) elaborating and building up the discourse, (5) clarifying understandings, and (6) disconfirming or rejecting.

Seedhouse (2004) studies turn-taking sequences and characterizes four classroom contexts based on the relationship between language use and pedagogic purpose. First, a form and accuracy context, where the focus is on linguistic form and accuracy and the pedagogic purpose is to elicit from learners a string of forms for evaluation. Interaction is teacher-fronted since turn-taking sequences are tightly controlled by the teacher. Second, a meaning and fluency context in which the teacher's goal is to maximize learners' participation opportunities by focusing on fluency and encouraging learners to express ideas, feeling, and personal experiences. Interaction is less structured and learners have more space to self-select and participate in classroom discourse. Third, a task-oriented context is where learners communicate with each other to complete a specific task in their learner-learner interaction. Fourth, a procedural context is where

the teacher manages classroom activities. There is a single long teacher turn and silence on the part of the learners.

In a similar vein, Walsh (2006) analyzes 14 lessons using a conversation analytic methodology, focuses on turn-taking mechanisms, and identifies four patterns which he called 'modes'. He specifies the pedagogic goals and interactional features of each mode. The first is 'managerial mode' in which the pedagogic goals are transmitting information, organizing the physical learning environment, referring learners to materials, introducing or concluding an activity, and changing from one mode of learning to another. A single extended teacher turn, the use of transitional markers and confirmation checks, and an absence of learner contributions are the interactional features of the mode. The second is 'materials mode' in which the goals are providing language practice around a piece of material, eliciting responses, checking answers, clarifying, and evaluating contributions using corrective form-focused feedback, scaffolding, and display questions. The third is 'skills and systems mode' in which the goals are enabling learners to produce correct forms and manipulate the target language, and providing learners with practice in sub-skills. The interactional features are teacher echo, display questions, scaffolding, extended teacher turns, and the like. The fourth is 'classroom context' in which the teacher tries to promote learners' oral fluency and enable them to express themselves clearly. The interactional features of this mode are referential questions, scaffolding, clarification requests, content feedback, minimal repair, and extended learner turns.

Identification of contexts has been an important step taken to raise consciousness in terms of the nature of classroom interaction. However, as far as learning efficacy is concerned, what matters more is the way such contexts are distributed in classroom interaction. Each of the identified contexts has its own unique contributions to classroom discourse, and at least exposes learners to L2 input. Even if a context provides input that is comprehensible (Krashen, 1985), it cannot claim to be a cradle of quality interaction, i.e. interaction which is 'acquisition rich' (Ellis, 1998, p. 145). For interaction to facilitate second language acquisition, it should provide learners with

opportunities for negotiation of meaning and active involvement in communicative activities such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and the like that promote comprehension and production (Long, 1983, 1996). In the words of Long (1996),

> negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS [native speaker] or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways. (pp. 451-452)

Not only should interaction provide learners with comprehensible input and opportunities for negotiation of meaning, but it should also 'push' learners to produce 'comprehensible output' (Swain, 1985). Production performs three important functions, i.e. noticing, hypothesis-testing, and metalinguistic functions, that are crucial to learners' interlanguage development (Swain, 1995); moreover, it can push learners to process language both semantically and syntactically (Swain, 1985).

Every identified context is not by nature capable of entailing comprehensible input, negotiation of meaning, and comprehensible output at the same time. The pedagogic goals and the inherent interactional features of some contexts tend to structure classroom interaction in such a way that it gives the control of the discourse totally to the teacher and leaves little, and at times no, space for the learners to benefit from interactional adjustments, fine-tuned input, and comprehensible output. Neither learners nor teachers seem to be after the construction of rich learner participation opportunities in those contexts; examples are procedural context and form and accuracy context in Seedhouse's (2004) framework. Thus, more weight should be given to those contexts that by their very nature promote quality interaction; this responsibility lies mainly with the teacher because it is the teacher who plays a more critical role in understanding, establishing and maintaining patterns of communication (Johnson, 1995) and can instigate and sustain quality interaction (Walsh, 2006). To sum up, aside from identification of

contexts, the way they are distributed is of paramount importance as far as promoting quality interaction is concerned. Moreover, the influence of interaction-external factors on the distribution of the contexts has been left under-researched due to tight constraints imposed on the study of classroom interaction by conversation analysis, i.e., merely focusing on what emerges from the data. In this study, we free ourselves from the constraints by pairing conversation analysis with quantitative procedures to find answers to the following research questions.

**Research Questions**

1) What interactional contexts emerge from analyzing EFL classroom discourse?
2) What is the distribution of the identified interactional contexts in EFL classes?
3) What is the effect of contextual factors, including teachers' training and learners' levels of language proficiency, on the distribution of the identified contexts?

## Method

The data come from a corpus of 52three-hour adult EFL classes at eight different language institutions in Tehran, the capital of Iran, and Mazandaran, a province in the northern part of the country. The classes were taught by 52 teachers (30 female and 22 male). As to their education, all teachers were graduates or graduating in one of the three academic disciplines involving English (Teaching= 25, Literature= 15, and Translation=12). At the time of data collection, the majority had been within the profession for over five years. Out of 52, twenty-eight teachers had taken teacher training courses. The classes ranged in proficiency level from A2 (lower-intermediate) through B1 (intermediate) to B2 (upper-intermediate) based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The classes also ranged in size from six to seventeen learners. The textbooks were Top Notch and Summit (Saslow & Ascher, 2011). To observe research ethics, informed consent was obtained from all participants a week before data collection.

The data were collected in two ways, i.e., audio-recording and video-recording. Three institutes already had wall-mounted cameras in their classes for observational purposes. The classes were videotaped there. Those in other institutes were audio-recorded by placing one voice recorder on the teachers' desks and another one on a vacant chair near the learners. Each class or lesson lasted ninety minutes and was recorded for two consecutive sessions. No attempt was made to alter the situations in any way. As a result, classroom events and interaction were recorded as they naturally occurred.

Three methodological procedures were adopted to analyze the collected data. Conversation analysis (CA) was utilized to identify what contexts emerge from the naturally-occurring interaction. To find the distribution of the emerged contexts, they were timed in minute based on their duration. Finally, a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to investigate the effects of contextual factors on the distribution of each context.

## Results

### Identification of Contexts

Upon recording the very first lesson, data analysis was launched according to the tenets of conversation analysis (Ten Have, 2007). The first recorded lesson was transcribed line-by-line based on Jefferson's (1983) transcription system (see Appendix). The focus then centered in a bottom-up fashion on the turns, sequences, and structural organization of the transcribed lesson to unravel the goals of the moment. Each pedagogic goal together with the turn-taking sequences encapsulating it constituted a pattern of interaction, i.e., an interactional context. Once the interactional contexts were identified within the first lesson, collection and analyses of the second lesson were performed either to identify further contexts or to find further instances of the already identified contexts. Thus, the processes of data collection and analysis were done iteratively.

Data collection and analysis terminated after 18 lessons because at that point we reached data saturation, i.e., "the point at which no new information is forthcoming from additional participants or setting"

(Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 640).  Following this data analysis spiral, it was possible to identify and establish four interactional contexts:  management-oriented  context,  form-oriented  context, meaning-oriented context, and skill-oriented context. The suffix '-*oriented*' was added to the names of the contexts since the pedagogic goals within turn-taking sequences were perceived based on the participants' own orientation toward the interaction. Omitting the suffix is possible under two conditions. First, participants should be asked to state their intended aims within a certain sequence. Second, the perceived and the stated aims should be matched. If the two are aligned, the suffix can be eliminated. However, within the methodological framework of CA, only participants' own orientation has legitimacy of analysis (Waring, 2008). In what follows, four extracts from the corpus exemplifying the four identified interactional contexts are presented.

### *Extract 1          Management-oriented context*

81  T ↓*Yes, that's right. Number 10, please you answer, Bahareh.*

82   L3     *"Without   proofs,   the   police   can't   arrest   him."  I(ncorrect)*

83   T     *Incorrect. Why?*

84   L3     *PROOF not proofs*

85   T     ↓*yes, very good. (2.0) Okay,   this   much   is   enough. (3.0)Now, let's go back to                the   student's   book. Pa:::ge103, Listening comprehension.(2.0) If you*

   *remember,  last  session  we  started  lesson  2,  "discuss controversial issues                politely". We listened to a conversation=*

86   L7     =*agreement and disagreement(1.0)*

87   T     *yes, we also covered ways of expressing agreement and disagreement. Finally,        we   learned   some   related vocabulary items. Now, on page 103, we're gonna*

   *listen to  "people's opinions about controversial issues". We*

*should complete                          the chart. So let me first put the CD in the player(6.0)*

88     L1     *Excuse me.  We should tick for and against?*

89     T     *no just the issues. Checking for or against is part C. now just part B.*

The class is focusing on reviewing workbook. The teacher nominates a learner (turn 81) to read out the answer to an item in the book (turn 82). L3's response is followed by teacher's feedback and a follow-up question (turn 84). After L3's correct contribution, the teacher provides her with a positive affective feedback (very good). The teacher's use of the transition marker "Okay" after a pause of two seconds signals the end of one part of the lesson (or a sequence closing third; Schegloff, 2007), and opens the gate to a new activity (i.e., listening comprehension). To manage this transition, the teacher takes two extended turns (85 & 87). In turn 85, the teacher refers learners to a specific material (student's book) and also a specific page number. Before introducing and locating the new activity, he first summarizes previously covered activities. In turn 87, the teacher provides learners with the procedural knowledge they need to do the new activity. In the meantime, he also organizes the physical conditions for learning by putting the CD in the player. Contrary to Walsh's hypothesis suggesting absence of learner contributions in managerial mode, this extract portrays a learner (L3) that takes initiative to voice a procedural problem in turn 88. The teacher responds to L1's initiation and clarifies the procedure in turn 89.

Turn-taking sequences (85 – 89) entail the teacher's use of language to manage teaching and learning and thus typifies a management-oriented context. In such a context, teachers take an extended turn to refer learners to specific materials, introduce and conclude activities, provide learners with the procedural information they need to deal with assigned activities, and the like. Management is not always verbal. Sometimes teachers set the scene by organizing the physical conditions for learning nonverbally, e.g., playing a CD. In this context, we do not have absence of learner contributions. Learners

still have very limited and little interactional space. They often use the space to ask teachers for clarification of the procedure.

### *Extract 2*        *Form-oriented context*

246        T        *Finished everybody?*

247        LL        *yes*

248        T        *Ok, so let's start. Who wants to answer number one? Just raise your hands.        (1.0)  Reza, you please.*

249        L5        *number one, "Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa in the sixteenth        century". The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci in the sixteenth century.*

250        T        *was painted, yes. ↑Very ↓good. Arman, you answer number two.*

251        L4        *"Brazilian photographer* ((mispronunciation))=

252        T        *=photographer*((correcting        L2's mispronunciation))

253        L4        *"photographer (1.0) ↑Sebastiao*

254        T        *↓yes, Sebastiao Salgado*

255        L4        *"Sebastiao Salgado took that photograph in 2004."That photo was took by        Braz=*

256        T        *=that photo ↑was=*

257        L6        *=taken=*

258        T        *=yes, taken. Take, took, taken. The past participle of take is taken. So go        ahead and read your answer again Arman.*

This extract is a continuation of grammar practice centering on the use of 'the passive voice'. The practice requires learners to change sentences from the active to the passive voice. The teacher has given learners time to do the exercises individually. After learners are done with the exercises, the teacher starts checking their answers. To

allocate turns, the teacher does not use individual nomination; rather, she adopts invitations to bid as a turn regulation procedure (Mehan, 1979; cited in Xie, 2011). In other words, the teacher asks learners to indicate their willingness to reply by means of raising their hands (turn 248). The teacher then cedes the turn to L5. After L5's response, the teacher confirms the accuracy of the response by emphasizing the form of the verb "was painted" and giving L5 a positive affective feedback (very good) in turn 250. For item number two, the teacher nominates another learner (L4). As soon as L4 mispronounces a word while reading the item aloud, the teacher latches (=) onto his turn to correct the mispronunciation. In turn 253, L4 seems to be uncertain about the correct pronunciation of a proper name as signaled by a rising intonation (↑) that the teacher again models the right pronunciation. Another instance of latching is observable in turns 255 and 256. When the form of the verb used by L4 is incorrect, the teacher immediately interrupts L4 mid-flow and gives him feedback on form. The corrective repair that the teacher deploys is not direct. The teacher echoes part of L4 response and highlights the locus of trouble by a rising intonation at the point (turn 256). Another learner (L6) immediately orients to the teacher's feedback and provides the right form. The teacher confirms L6's contribution and starts clarifying the accurate form of the verb (258).

Extract 2 is a typical example of a form-oriented context. In such a context, the primary pedagogic goal is for the learners to master accurate linguistic forms, i.e., phonology, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, etc. To do so, teachers use display questions, form-focused feedback, echoes, repairs, and the like. As far as turn-taking sequences are concerned, it is the teacher who initiates the turns, the learner who responds, and the teacher who gives feedback. Therefore, the tripartite exchange structure known as IRF (teacher initiation, student response, teacher follow-up/feedback; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) is the prevailing pattern of interaction in this context. The form of interaction is teacher-fronted, but learners have some degrees of interactional space depending on the teacher's approach to teaching, i.e., deductive or inductive, and the nature of activity at hand. The

amount of space is still little, but more than that of the management-oriented context.

### *Extract 3      Skill-oriented context*

102      T      *yes, it gives us the meaning of the term personality. So the first paragraph is a      definition paragraph. Now please read the second paragraph and tell me the      main idea, the topic sentence. Please read it* ((silent reading)) (52.0) *Finished?*

103      L5      *YES*

104      T      *good. Anybody else? (5.0)*

105      L2      *finished.*

106      T      *good. So what is the main idea?* ((Looking at L5))

107      L5      *"this school of thought is called the nurture school." (2.0)*

108      T      *we:::ll, that's right, but it is the conclusion or concluding sentence. But what      is the topic sentence? (1.0)*

109      L6      *the first sentence, "for hundreds of years"=*

110      L2      *=no, "some people think personality develops as a result of the environment".*

111      T      *yes, that's right. "Some people think personality develops as a result of the      environment." Just take a look at the title of the lesson. What is the title?(1.5)*

112      L2      *"personality: from nature or nurture?"=*

113      T      *no, that's the title of the passage. I said the title of the lesson*

114      L5      *"discuss personality and its origin"*

115          T          *yes, the first paragraph talked about the definition of personality, and this                 paragraph is talking about its origin. It says the origin is the environment.=*

116          L6          *= but you said the first sentence is the topic =*

117          T          *= no, I said if the topic sentence is explicit and you can find it in the                 paragraph, it is usually the first sentence. Sometimes it comes in the middle and sometimes at the end of the paragraph.*

The class is focusing on a passage entitled 'Personality: from nature or nurture'. The reading skill that teacher pursues is skimming for main ideas. Upon identifying the main idea of the first paragraph, the teacher asks learners to individually and silently read the second paragraph and locate its topic sentence (turn 102). After giving learners time to do the task and checking for its completion (turns 102 & 104), the teacher nonverbally, via gesture and eye contact, nominates L5 whose emphatic 'YES' in turn 103 renders her willingness to seize the turn and provide the second part of the adjacency pair. The occurrence of post-response wait-time (Rowe, 1974; Yaqubi & Pourhaji, 2012) followed by the lengthened vowel sound of the word 'well' in turn 108 signals that the sequence needs to be expanded further due to a disprefered second pair part (Schegloff, 2007). The unfolded sequence, from turn 108 onwards, evolves from the learners' perceptions of the topic sentence (turns 109 & 110) and the teacher's evaluation of and elaboration on their perceptions (turns 111, 115, & 117). In his evaluation and elaboration, the teacher raises learners' consciousness about how to benefit from contextual information (e.g., the title of the lesson) and the structural organization of the paragraph (turn 117) in reading comprehension.

In a skill-oriented context, the teacher aims at helping learners acquire, practice, and develop the language skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The pedagogical practice within such a context often revolves around equipping learners with strategies, e.g., making inferences in listening, summarizing in reading, sequencing events in writing, and using minimal responses in speaking. The principal interactional feature associated with this context is the teacher's use of

scaffolding (Walsh, 2006). The patterns of turn-taking sequences are still controlled by the teacher, but less tightly than those in management-oriented and form-oriented contexts. In other words, learners have more interactional space in this context than they do in the two previously-identified contexts.

***Extract 4     Meaning-oriented context***

336T     > *Close your books and listen everybody. Let me ask you a question.<                    (3.0)Where would you prefer to live, in the country or the city?*

337L7     *excuse me, which country?=*

338T     *= no, no. I mean (.) do you like to live in a city or a village?*

339L4     *in the village=*

340T     *=Why?*

341L4     *because the air is not dirty in the village, but in the city we have pollution.*

342T     *°yes°, there are different types of pollution in the city.*

343L9     *I don't know why people in the village want to go to the city and people in the          city want to go to village. (2.0)*

344L7     *because in the village people work  a  lot  in  the  farm. They are always                    tired.=*

345L4     *= no, people in the CITY are  always  tired.  They  are sick. They work a lot.                    They have traffic. (2.0)*

346L7     *but they have (1.0) emkanat   (facilities) ((using L1))=*

347L3     *=facilities(2.0)*

348T     *I tend to agree with Fatemeh. Although people work hard in the country, they                    are healthy. And I think people in the city work as much as    people in the                    country, and sometimes more than that. Elahe asked a very good question. I*

*think in most cases we're not satisfied with our living condition.*

This episode starts with the teacher asking the whole class a referential question about learners' preference for urban or rural life.L7's clarification request in turn 337 obliges the teacher to rephrase the question in the next turn. In turn 339, L4 self-selects herself and provides a response. The teacher immediately latches onto L4's turn and asks a follow-up question leading to L4's elaboration on her previous contribution. The teacher expresses his approval of L4's contribution by softly uttering '°yes°', and then he provides her with content feedback (turn 342). At the end of the teacher's turn, there is a period indicating a falling intonation. That is a TPR (transition-relevant point) – a point at which TCU (turn constructional unit) comes to a possible completion and thus speaker transition becomes relevant (Sacks et al., 1974). L9 orients to this interactional rule, moves out of the IRF sequences, and initiates a turn to pose a subtopic (turn 343). Other learners orient to L9's initiation and negotiate the subtopic in their learner-learner interaction. The unfolding of this sort of interaction owes to the teacher's withdrawal from providing the F move of the sequence. In other words, the teacher does not do the terminal act of closing the sequence by his feedback; rather, he implements wait-time so that the sequence gets expanded. Finally, after giving feedback on the content of the responses, in a reversal of roles, the teacher orients to L9's initiation and starts providing a response (turn 348).

Extract 4 portrays an instance of a meaning-oriented context. In such a context, the major pedagogic goal is to promote fluency rather than accuracy through encouraging learners to talk about their experience, feelings, reactions, preferences, etc. The use of content feedback, clarification requests, confirmation checks, referential questions, minimal repairs, and the like characterizes the main interactional features of the context. From among the four identified contexts, it is in meaning-oriented context that learners have the most freedom to control and sometimes alter turn-taking sequences. The ample interactional space within the context provides them with opportunities to experience the process of 'topicalization' (Slimani,

1992), i.e., posing and developing a topic (e.g., turn 343), take initiatives, exercise agency, and have increased participation in classroom interaction.

**Distribution of Contexts**

Upon identifying the contexts of classroom interaction, the whole data were revisited to explore the distribution of each context within the global context of EFL classroom interaction. To do so, we measured the duration of each context in minute by meticulously listening to 52 pairs of recorded classes. As shown in Table 1, management-oriented context constituted nearly 16.5% (15 min.) of classroom interaction. Around 33 minutes of classroom (36.5%) entailed form-oriented interaction. Skill-oriented context comprised around 35.5% (32 min.) of classroom discourse. Finally, about 10 minutes (11.5%) of interaction was devoted to meaning.

Table 1

*Duration and Percentage of Interactional Contexts*

| Contexts | Duration (min.) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Management-oriented | 15 | 16.5 |
| Form-oriented | 33 | 36.5 |
| Skill-oriented | 32 | 35.5 |
| Meaning-oriented | 10 | 11.5 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

As illustrated above in the analyses of the extracts about the pedagogic goals and interactional features of the identified contexts, it is expected that teachers promote meaning-oriented context since it provides learners with ample participation opportunities, i.e., a prerequisite for quality interaction. However, the findings of this phase of the study reveal that the bulk of interaction in EFL classes is devoted to practicing accuracy of linguistic forms and developing

language skills. Meaning-oriented context forms the smallest proportion of classroom interaction.

**Effect of Contextual Factors**

A two-way between-groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate the effect of teachers' training, with two grouping levels (Group 1: Yes & Group 2: No), and learners' level of language proficiency, with three grouping levels (Group 1: Lower-intermediate, Group 2: Intermediate, & Group 3: Upper-intermediate), on the distribution of interactional contexts in EFL classes. The four dependent variables were: management-oriented, form-oriented, skill-oriented, and meaning-oriented contexts which were all measured in minute. To reduce the risk of Type 1 error across multiple tests, the alpha value of .05 was divided by the number of dependent variables and was set at .012 using a Bonferroni adjustment. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multi collinearity, with no serious violations noted. With the use of Wilks' criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by both learners' level of language proficiency, $F(8, 86) = 26.4$, $p = .000$; Wilks' Lambada = .083; partial eta squared = .71, and teachers' training, $F(4, 43) = 4.03$, $p = .007$; Wilks' Lambada= .727; partial eta squared = .27, but not by their interaction, $F(8, 86) = .959$, $p = .47$.

Afterwards, the results of the dependent variables were considered separately across learners' levels of language proficiency, teachers' training, and their interactional effects. As shown in Table 2, learners' levels of language proficiency significantly affected form-oriented context, $F(2, 49) = 76.93$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .79, meaning-oriented context, $F(2, 49) = 76.93$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .77, skill-oriented context, $F(2, 49) = 39.76$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .63, and management oriented context, $F(2, 49) = 33.03$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .59.

Table 2
*Comparison of Interactional Contexts across Level and Training*

| Independent Variables | Dependent Variables | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level** | Form | 1387.080 | 2 | 693.540 | 88.777 | .000 | .794 |
| | Meaning | 778.897 | 2 | 389.449 | 76.936 | .000 | .770 |
| | Skill | 664.326 | 2 | 332.163 | 39.760 | .000 | .634 |
| | Manage | 275.794 | 2 | 137.897 | 33.035 | .000 | .590 |
| **Training** | Form | 72.288 | 1 | 72.288 | 9.253 | .004 | .167 |
| | Meaning | 14.250 | 1 | 14.250 | 2.815 | .100 | .058 |
| | Skill | .001 | 1 | .001 | .000 | .990 | .000 |
| | Manage | 29.024 | 1 | 29.024 | 6.953 | .011 | .131 |
| **Level *Training** | Form | 1.041 | 2 | .521 | .067 | .936 | .003 |
| | Meaning | 7.838 | 2 | 3.919 | .774 | .467 | .033 |
| | Skill | 1.260 | 2 | .630 | .075 | .927 | .003 |
| | Manage | 6.567 | 2 | 3.284 | .787 | .461 | .033 |

An inspection of the mean length of time indicated that as learners' proficiency increases, the duration of focus on linguistic forms decreases. Conducting follow-up univariate analyses together with post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that all three groups significantly differed from one another. The mean length of time for lower-intermediate group ($M = 38.41$, $SD = 2.91$) was significantly different from that of the intermediate group ($M = 31.68$, $SD = 3.11$) and the upper-intermediate group ($M = 25.38$, $SD = 2.87$), and also between intermediate and upper-intermediate groups. The duration of focus on meaning increased with an increase in the learners' proficiency. Post-hoc comparisons indicated significant

differences across all three groups, i.e., lower-intermediate ($M$ = 5.65, $SD$ = 1.32), intermediate ($M$ = 10.26, $SD$ = 2.15), and upper-intermediate ($M$ = 15.37, $SD$ = 3.02).In the case of skill-oriented context, lower-intermediate group ($M$ = 26.65, $SD$ = 1.99) significantly differed from either of the two groups, intermediate ($M$ = 33.53, $SD$ = 3.09) and upper-intermediate ($M$ = 34.94, $SD$ = 3.15), in a sense that in lower-intermediate classes teachers work less on language skills than they do in higher-level classes. There was not a significant difference on the duration of focus on language skills between intermediate and upper-intermediate groups. Finally, the analyses indicated that teachers' use of language for managerial purposes takes a significantly longer time at lower-intermediate levels ($M$ = 19.29, $SD$ = 2.61) in comparison with intermediate levels ($M$ = 14.47, $SD$ = 1.86) and upper-intermediate levels ($M$ = 14.31, $SD$ = 1.92), but not between intermediate and upper-intermediate groups.

As shown above in Table 2, training also had a significant main effect on form-oriented context, $F$ (1, 50) = 9.25, $p$ = .004, partial eta squared = .16, and management-oriented context, $F$ (1, 50) = 6.95, $p$ = .011, partial eta squared = .13. However, the effect of training did not reach statistical significance on meaning-oriented context, $F$ (1, 50) = 2.81, $p$ > .012, nor on skill-oriented context, $F$ (1, 50) = .990, $p$ > .012. An inspection of mean length of time showed that trained teachers spend more time on form-oriented context ($M$ = 33.14, $SD$ = 5.85) than teachers without training ($M$ = 30.54, $SD$ = 5.98). In the case of management, training was found to decrease the amount of time teachers spend on managing the class. Teachers with training spent less time on management-oriented context ($M$ = 15.29, $SD$= 2.77) than those without training ($M$ = 16.83, $SD$ = 3.38). As Wilks' criterion indicated before, the interaction effect between learners' level of language proficiency and teachers' training was not statistically significant.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to empirically further our understanding of classroom interaction in an EFL setting. Upon acknowledging the plurality and fluidity of contexts, data from a

corpus of 52 three-hour naturally-occurring interaction were analyzed using the methodological tenets of conversation analysis to capture and identify interactional contexts. Afterwards, the identified contexts were studied to determine how they are distributed within the global context of classroom interaction. The qualitative conversation analytic procedures and findings were paired with quantitative procedures to investigate the effect of two interaction-external factors, i.e., learners' language proficiency and teachers' training, on the distribution of the identified contexts. Four interactional contexts, including form-oriented, meaning-oriented, skill-oriented, and management-oriented contexts, emerged from analyzing turn-taking sequences. The interactional features and pedagogic goals of each context were also identified and illustrated via extracts from the data. As to their distribution, analyses of the recorded data indicated that the bulk of interaction was allocated to practicing and developing linguistic forms and language skills. Dialogic interaction in a meaning-oriented context constituted the smallest proportion of classroom interaction. Finally, a two-way multivariate analysis of variance showed that learners' levels of language proficiency significantly affected the distribution of all interactional contexts, but teacher training had a significant main effect on just two interactional contexts, i.e., form-oriented and management-oriented contexts.

As to the first research question, the findings of this study provide detailed and localized awareness of both the structuring of interaction and pedagogic goals in EFL classes as they naturally get unfolded. They resonate with the work of those scholars and practitioners (Jarvis & Robinson, 1997; Seedhouse, 2004; Van Lier, 1998; Walsh, 2006) who attempted to identify dynamic contexts of classroom interaction. However, the interactional contexts already identified in the literature have not been adopted for four reasons. First, it is the mentality of the methodological framework of this study, i.e., conversation analysis, to focus on patterns of interaction emerging from the data rather than imposing predetermined codes and categories on the data. Second, interaction is a 'situated' and culture-bound practice (Yaqubi & Pourhaji, 2012). Adopting prior classifications would mean to de-contextualize a highly localized phenomenon. Third, previous studies

rested upon a corpus of five to fourteen lessons. The size, composition, and in-depth analyses of the data in this study aimed at drawing a fuller and more detailed picture of what goes on in EFL classes. Finally, locating the identified contexts on a continuum of interactional space, ranging from management-oriented context (the least space) through form-oriented context and skill-oriented context to meaning-oriented context (the most space), tends to signify levels of participation each context inherently and potentially entails.

Concerning the second research question, studying the distribution of contexts displayed symptoms of a disease that used to be widespread, but now to a large extent under control, in ESL contexts a couple of decades ago. We term that disease 'classroom monopoly'. It develops, according to Musumeci (1996, p. 314), when "teachers […] speak more, more often, control the topic of conversation, rarely ask questions for which they do not have answers". In other words, meaningful interaction plays the smallest role in classes as long as teachers tightly control the topic and structure of the discourse and determine who may take the turn and when (Cazden, 1986). Teachers' adherence to IRF interaction patterns has been a means of establishing and sustaining the system of power relations in classes where learners' voice is 'marginalized'. In such a context, learners cannot pose problems since 'the banking model of education' (Freire, 1970) renders them the 'oppressed' members of classroom. Different frameworks have been developed for teacher training purposes, e.g., self-evaluation of teacher talk (Walsh, 2006; 2011), in order to foster a more egalitarian discourse structure in ESL contexts. The training programs specifically focused on what Van Lier (1991) calls improvising or 'the second ingredient of good teaching'; that is, the ability to make online interactive decisions that are in line with the pedagogic goals of the moment and facilitate second language acquisition (Johnson, 1995; Walsh, 2002). This ability is embedded in teacher's classroom interactional competence (CIC), i.e., "ability to use interaction as tool for mediating and assisting learning" (Walsh, 2006, p. 132). Therefore, the findings of this study question whether training programs in EFL contexts have contributed to the development of teachers' CIC, a prerequisite for promoting a meaning-oriented context.

Studying the effect of learners' levels of language proficiency demonstrated that learners can emancipate themselves, from the tightly-controlled discourse of form-oriented context structured by teacher's management-oriented discourse, with the help of their increased language proficiency. In other words, proficiency urges learners to exercise the right to move out of IRF sequences, take initiatives, create interactional space, and control the discourse, as in Extract 4. However, training was not found to be geared to the development of meaning-oriented context. It affected the contexts that incarcerate learners' interactional space, i.e., form-oriented and management-oriented contexts.

There is ample evidence in the literature that interactional capabilities can be acquired through training (Johnson, 1995; Walsh, 2011, Wyse, 2003). The first step that needs to be taken to change the status quo is consciousness-raising. Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study tend to raise teachers and teacher trainers consciousness about the interactional organization of EFL classroom interaction, unequal distribution of interactional contexts, and the importance of classroom interactional competence (CIC). From research perspective, this study showed how mixing methods, i.e., qualitative with quantitative, can provide a better understanding of classroom discourse. Moreover, it suggests a method for quantitatively measuring the quality of interaction.

In closing, this article is far behind portraying the whole picture of classroom interaction in an EFL context. This study investigated the effect of just two contextual factors, learners' language proficiency and teachers' training. Further research is warranted to study the effect of other contextual factors, e.g., teacher experience, academic education, textbook, etc., on the distribution of interactional contexts. This study did not consider interaction-internal factors that might have decreased the proportion of meaning-oriented context. Further conversation analytic studies should be done to explore the factors that can obstruct or construct meaning-oriented discourse. Last but not least, this study calls upon the development of a framework that can help teachers how to use language for the purpose of mediating learning.

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# Appendix

*Transcription Notation*

Conversation analytic transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (1983)


(.)            untimed perceptible pause within a turn

underline        stress

CAPS              very emphatic stress

↑        high pitch on word

.        sentence-final falling intonation

?        yes/ no question rising intonation

,        phrase-final intonation (more to come)

:        lengthened vowel sound (extra colons indicate greater lengthening)

=        latch (direct onset or no space between two unites)

→        highlights point of analysis

[ ]        overlapped talk; in order to reflect the simultaneous beginning and

          ending of the overlapped talk, sometimes extra spacing is used to

          spread out the utterance

˚soft˚          spoken softly/ decreased volume

><        increased speed

( )        (empty parentheses) transcription impossible

(words)    uncertain transcription

(3)        silence; length given in tenth of a second

$words$    spoken in a smiley voice

((  ))                         comments on background, skipped talk or nonverbal behavior

{(( )) words.}      {  } marks the beginning and ending of the simultaneous occurrence of

the verbal/ silence and nonverbal; absence of {  } means that the

simultaneous occurrence applies to the entire turn.

L1: L2: etc.,         identified Learner

T           teacher

"words"          words quoted, from a textbook for example