



Classroom Interaction — Different Turn Designs of Question and Evaluation of Teacher's Talk

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Abstract: As the core element of classroom interaction, teacher's talk plays an extremely vital role in that it contains numerous question and evaluation turns. It's through the question-answer-evaluation sequence that the teacher raises different class topics, tests the students, and gives further feedback. There are different ways for the teacher to raise questions and evaluate the students' answers. Consequently, this paper will analyze and classify various types of turn designs of question and evaluation in teacher's talk based on real classroom observation, thus shedding light on pedagogical and practical implications for teaching and learning.

Keywords: classroom interaction, teacher's talk, turn design, question-answer-evaluation sequence

1. Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) is a sociology branch developed by Harvey Sacks (1992) with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, studying what the action does in relation to the preceding actions, and what it projects about the succeeding actions. (Heritage & Clayman, 2010:14). The fundamental idea of CA is studying the institutionalized structural organizations of practices to which participants are normatively oriented. (ibid. 14) The main research focus of this paper is institutional conversation which emerged in the late 1970s, whose objective is how particular institutional tasks are managed and discharged through talk, without regard for the similarities and differences to ordinary conversation.

Classroom interaction is an unignorable institutional conversation. Students can use what they have already learned to answer the teacher's questions and test whether what they know needs to be further expanded because classroom talk involves a special question-answer-evaluation sequence. Teacher's talk is the main medium for both the teacher and students to deal with information, which runs through the whole process of teaching activities.

The turn-taking procedure is also special in classroom interaction, in that the turn-type is pre-allocated. The teacher is restricted to ask questions, and the students are the respondents. Another decisive feature is the departure from it will be viewed as vulnerable to sanctions. Students should obey the teacher's constructions in classroom interaction because explicit sanctions do occur in the interaction process.

2. Data and methodology

This paper therefore uses conversation analysis method to probe into the different turn designs of teacher's talk. The data used in this paper are collected from the browsable database of TalkBank, ClassBank. Three videos of the same class are chosen, and the total video length is around 50 minutes. The videos are about a survey lesson that is conducted between one teacher and one student in English.

3. Different turn design of question and evaluation in teacher's talk

McHoul (1978) has pointed out that a great deal of classroom talk involves the question-answer-evaluation sequence. The teacher uses questions in class to obtain teaching information, detect concept understanding, and inspire students to think. The questions are designed by the teacher in advance and the answers are fixed, because the teacher's questions in class take the key information as the main content and orientation.

Based on the classroom observation of this paper, the teacher will use various types of turn designs in the question and evaluation phases of the sequence to convey new knowledge and test students' understanding. This paper consequently aims at finding out how they are performed differently through turn-taking procedures, turn designs and special sequence organizations, which will be explained respectively next.

Straight Interrogatives + Comment

The first way is interrogative questions with positive comments. Teacher's questions entitle him to evaluate the correctness or otherwise of the student's responses, so the commonest way to put forward questions is normal interrogative sentence, and the teacher tends to directly give feedback about being satisfied or not to fulfill evaluation.

01 TEA: So if I'm studying this particular phenomena and I say
02 my ah my new technique is ah
03 helps children get over aggression.
04 TEA: .hh "What do you mean by aggression"?
05 STU: Well aggression is the number of times the child struck
06 out at another child; you know over this amount of time.
07 STU: That's how I define aggression.
08 TEA: Okay. Sounds(0.4) quite right.

The teacher first asks one question in a clear interrogative form "What do you mean by aggression" in line 4, aiming at testing the student's comprehension. So, the student answers her definition of aggression in line 5-6 as "the number... time". And she then reminds the teacher of the completion of her answer in line 7 "That's how I define aggression". Since the question is asked to test whether the student knows the definition clearly, rather than gaining any new knowledge, the teacher only gives positive comment as "Sounds quite right" in line 8, performing the evaluation function in this process because he gives positive feedback.

Declarative Questions + Comment

Questions can also be carried out in declarative question forms which contain indicators, such as "So," "And," and teacher's pause. These marks in sentences indicate that the sentences need to be finished because the teacher is waiting to be answered. Then based on the student's response, the teacher will give relative comments to finish this sequence.

09 TEA: Alright, we'll talk about measurement now (.)
10 We haven't defined variables.
11 So,
12 STU: Well, from what I understand a variable is like a
13 categories and things, objects, items, or ah it could
14 be ah it could be aggression or anxiety.
15 TEA: Sure.
16 STU: And anything that you can ah
17 put a value to ok like ah
18 gender, male female, ah the level of anxiety you know,
19 if you had taken your heart beat, the number of heart
20 beats, whatever.
21 TEA: Ok, that.

The teacher first asks questions in declarative form, stating the fact that "we haven't defined variables" (line 3). Then in line 3, the teacher leaves the question to the student with a clear indicator remark "So", indicating that it's a question waiting to be answered. And the student gives her comprehension in line 4-6. The answer of the student seems to be detailed enough, so the teacher gives his positive comment of evaluation "Sure" in line 7. And after the supplementary explanation in line 8-12, the teacher assures the student's non-problematic comprehension, so he gives again a positive comment "Ok, that" in line 13 and ends up this sequence.

Straight Interrogatives + Further Inquiry + Comment

When the teacher deals with students' errors, one preferable way is by straight interrogative and inquiry series to consecutively ask students for further correction. The teacher can also remind the students of their mistakes with question series, requiring further consideration to overtly inform them of the inadequacies.

22 TEA: Okay, um explain using an example,
 23 how reactivity might affect blood pressure.
 24 STU: Yeah, ah sometimes I think that if you know that you
 25 gotta ah okay like for instance
 26 um I don't know if this is a good one or not
 27 but if you're afraid of snakes or
 28 something like that you know and you see a snake and
 29 somebody takes your blood pressure.
 30 TEA: Umm hmm.
 31 STU: It's gonna be higher.
 32 STU: You know and you're reacting to you know the snake
 33 But I think what you're saying is in the experiment
 34 And you know that you're being observed
 35 then you know you won't be your natural self.
 36 TEA: Alright, how might reactivity affect test taking
 37 ability?
 38 STU: Oh yeah. Ah probably in the same way um if
 39 you know that ah your gonna ah le ah the pressure is
 40 on you know? Ah you'd have to get an A on this final,
 41 you're gonna be so nervous and so upset,
 42 that when you
 43 go in there you're gonna go ahead and flunk the test.
 44 probably not because you didn't read the material
 45 but because you're so nervous about the test.
 46 TEA: Umm hmm. Okay, that'd work.

The teacher raises his question in line 2 with a normal interrogative sentence. But the student answers the question first with a quite long preface in line 3-5, and she then directly displays her unsureness by "I don't know if this is a good one or not" in line 5. The student answers the question both in line 6-8 and line 10-14, but her answers is not about the discussion topic, so the teacher further inquires the student with the theme question "Alright, how might reactivity affect test taking ability?" in line 27-28. And this time, the student focuses on the topic and give a detailed explanation of it (line 17-24), and the teacher gives evaluation as "Umm hmm. Okay, that'd work." in line 25 to show being affirmative of the optimized answer.

Negative Declaratives + Further Inquiry + Comment

The teacher can also state explicitly that the student's answer is problematic by directly asserting disputing stance and can ask the student for further correction with inquiry series. And another possible way of raising objection is declaring what the teacher believes to be right, covertly indicating the student that the answer needs optimization, followed further inquiry. Both two evaluation methods are because the teacher believes the student's answer can be re-arranged, so the declaratives can be viewed as negative for the later inquiry and comment to be put forward.

47 STU: Ok uhm let's see intervals, um that's ya know grouping
 48 ya know your numbers ah let's say um from one to ten.
 49 Let's say you have intervals of two classification.
 50 You you have that look on your face.
 51 TEA: Yeah, I'm not sure I understand you.
 52 STU: Intervals is ah when you break ah,
 53 You categories down into groups.
 54 TEA: Just give me an example [of an interval scale.
 55 STU: [An example of an interval
 56 scale, let's see um I keep thinking of like a one
 57 hundred and you group it into
 58 intervals of twenty five.

59 It's four groups of twenty five.
60 TEA: Yeah ok.

The student first talks about her understanding of intervals in line 2-3. But this comprehension is ambiguous to the teacher, which can be seen from his negative declarative in line 5. So, the teacher in line 8 invites the student for further correction with an imperative sentence "Just give me an example of an interval scale". The student follows the teacher's instruction twice to talk about her understanding of interval in line 6-7, and a concrete example in line 9-13. After the supplementary explanations, the answer seems to be correct enough to the teacher, and he is also sure that the student's understanding of intervals is not problematic, so he replies with a clear positive comment of evaluation in the feedback phase "Yeah ok" in line 14 to show his acknowledgment.

4. Conclusion

Teacher's talk is both an important source of students' input and the opportunity for students to express, get feedback, find and correct problems. Based on the classroom observation of the data, this paper focuses on different turn designs of teacher's talk in raising questions and evaluating students' answers, aiming to figure out how teacher's talk performs in the classroom interaction and give relative classifications of turn designs as well as detailed examples respectively.

The questions of the teacher in the class mainly convey a knowing stance towards the respondents. How the teacher solicits information can be distinguished mainly into four types in terms of turn designs in question and feedback. The first way is using straight interrogative questions and giving comments directly. Straight interrogatives are the commonest type for the teacher to raise questions. And the teacher will directly comment with relative remarks to show their stance in the evaluation phase. Declarative forms can also be used to carry out overt questions. And the teacher tends to design sentences with the help of indicators, indicating the students that they are asking questions. Straight interrogatives can also play the role of figuring out problems when the teacher evaluates the student's answer to be inadequate. The teacher will directly point out the shortcomings of the student's answers in question form and further inquiry series to evaluate whether the student has made full comprehension. And the last way of evaluating the student's answer is negative declarative. This turn design frequently appears when the teacher finds the answer to be incorrect. Instead of further testing the student, the teacher tends to straightly point out the problem by himself with negative comments, reminding the student that certain problems exist. Then based on the teacher's instructions, the student will further correct their answers.

The insights gained from the findings can hopefully shed light on the pedagogical implications for teaching and learning. The special turn-taking organizations should be taken advantage of to promote effective classroom interaction, which means that the teacher should manage the whole interaction process to fulfill the purpose of imparting knowledge and evaluating students. This paper can also help students to know about the specialties of classroom turning-taking systems, as well as the teacher's intentions for different question turn designs. Consequently, they can manage to align better with the teacher's teaching purpose thus supporting a smoother classroom interaction from where they stand.

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