

The Analysis of the Features of Interaction in Instructed SLA*

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Abstract—This study investigates the interaction in university instructed setting in China. It reveals the interactional patterns, the strategies used in the negotiation of meaning and language forms being negotiated in classroom. The results show that the most frequently used interactional pattern and strategy of negotiation of meaning is IRF and comprehension check. But data shows that more complicated interactional patterns such as IRF(I)RF, IR [I¹ R¹ (I² R²)] F and IR¹F¹ / R²F² are being used. They are beneficial in promoting students' language production. And we also found that there is focus on form in the negotiation of meaning, which can help to raise learner's awareness of language forms in meaningful communication.

Index Terms—interactional pattern, negotiation of meaning, conversation analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the goal of L2 instruction and learning is to develop learners' communicative competence. (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). Interactions and conversations that learners participate in classroom are of great importance because it is in this setting that learners receive information about the correctness and incorrectness of their utterances (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Interaction in instructional setting is of great importance because it decides what opportunities it provides for the learner, in what way they are exposed to what kind of input of target language, whether or not it leads to the production of target language and in what form. This study analyzes the interaction in instructional setting in China, aiming to find its features and provide implications for English teaching in China.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Instructed Second Language Acquisition

The term Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA) is used to refer to the subdomain of SLA that investigates the effects of manipulating various aspects of the L2 learning endeavor, from L2 input, to language processing and contexts of learning (Loewen, 2017, p.10). ISLA 'emphasizes mental processes such as information processing and internalization, storage of knowledge, and production of language as correlates of some form of pedagogical intervention' (Han & Nassaji, 2019, p.395). There are two dimensions in analyzing the features of L2 instructional context, one is language context and the other is cognitive context, which Ellis proposed as two conceptual frameworks in 1990: classroom as interaction and classroom as formal instruction. So basing on this framework, the study of classroom interaction includes: (1) to describe the features of classroom discourse; (2) to check the relationship between features of classroom discourse and language acquisition; (3) to control certain features of classroom discourse and intervene the process of language learning; (4) to identify the elements that can influence the features of classroom discourse. This study is mainly concerned with the first study, to have a description of the features of classroom conversation. But it goes a step further, on the basis of the analysis of the data we observed, this study tries to investigate what we can do to teacher-students interaction to make it more beneficial for language acquisition.

B. Interaction in Instructed Setting

"Interaction" is the conversation in class that learners take part in. Interaction is important because in this process learners receive information and find out whether their utterances are correct or not. The Interaction Approach was formed in the early 1980s and updated in 1996 by Long. It has witnessed a growth in empirical research and is now subjected to meta-analyses and research syntheses. (Keck, Iberri-Shea, Tracy Venture, & Wa-Mbaleka, 2006; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Macky & Goo, 2007; Norris & Ortega, 2000). It is widely accepted today that there is a robust connection between interaction and learning.

Interaction in instructed setting is the process by which samples of the target language becomes available to the learner for interlanguage construction. (Ellis, 1990, p. 93). The following example shows us the typical structure of interaction in classroom.

T: R _____, What is _____?

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L1: This is a book.
 T: Wait. What is this?
 L1: This is book.
 T: 'A'.
 L1: This is a book.
 T: Right. Very good. What are these?
 L1: What is _____
 L2: These are _____
 L1: This – these are rubbers.
 T: Rubbers.
 L1: Rubbers. (Ellis, 1990, p. 94)

This episode is a typical teacher-student interaction. It consists of display questions and evaluative and corrective feedbacks on the part of the teacher and responses from the students. The language knowledge talked about in this episode is the third-person copula. It is also a form-focused sequence in which language form is emphasized, negotiated and acquired. So interaction in class has its typical patterns and modes. Negotiation of meaning usually triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor. It helps to facilitate acquisition because it connects input, internal capacities and output in a productive way. A clear description of the communicative patterns and the strategies of negotiation of meaning can help to give us some hints of how learning happens in a traditional English class in the University in China.

C. *The Analysis of Classroom Interaction: Conversation Analysis (CA)*

In a CA view, all meaning is created and negotiated in interaction. Sinclair and Coulthard, basing on Halliday's theory of scale and category grammar, developed a model of analyzing classroom discourse, which involves a series of ranks and levels arranged in a hierarchical order. Ranks at discourse level are in descending order. They are: *Lesson, Transaction, Exchange, Move* and *Act*. In practice Sinclair and Coulthard were to be remembered most for the Moves they identified: *Initiation, Response* and *Feedback* move, known as the *IRF*. In their description, the typical exchange in the classroom consists of an *initiation* by the teacher, followed by a *response* from the student, then the *feedback* to the student's response given by the teacher. Each separate part of a move is one act. So *acts* are the units at the lowest rank of discourse. For this, we will have detailed explanation in the following part of this chapter.

Acts make up moves, and moves make up *exchanges*. The exchange is the primary unit of language interaction, and it has a structure made up of IRF:

Initiation (I)	Response (R)	Feedback (F)
<i>Who is the student teacher today?</i>	<i>Mary.</i>	<i>Ok.</i>

Exchange is that of the smallest structured interchange between speakers. We can still find discourse with more moves than IRF, these extended moves serve more targets either to promote language production or to focus certain language form.

According to Sinclair and Coulthard, a typical classroom exchange consists of three moves: an initiating move, a responding move and a follow-up move. The teacher makes the initiation move and the follow-up move with students being restricted to responding moves. This is still the pattern in a good many language classes, especially in large classes of perhaps 40 to 50 students. Where this happens, it is likely that students will have little chance to practice different utterance functions. The following example is a typical classroom exchange made up of three moves.

T: So, now, I have a question, if you have a robot at home, what kind of job would you like it to do for your family?
 (initiating move)
 S: I want it to do some housework for my family, if possible, I want him have talk with me. (responding move)
 T: OK, so you want it like a person. (follow-up move)

This is a typical three parts exchange. In such language classrooms, learners rarely get the opportunity to take other than the responding role, and even in classes where students have the opportunity to initiate, the follow-up move is often still in the hands of the teacher, and learners get little or no practice in this particular discourse pattern.

D. *Negotiation of Meaning*

The interaction hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input. It also seeks to explain how acquisition comes about and makes claims regarding which kinds of interaction will best promote it (Ellis, 1990, p. 107). According to Long, there are three ways of making input comprehensible (1983a, p. 128):

- (1) by means of input simplifications;
- (2) through the use of linguistic and extra-linguistic context; and
- (3) through modification of the interactional structure of conversation.

Long (1981) refers to (1) as input features and (3) as interactional features and argues that acquisition is only made possible if interactional adjustments are present. The presence of such adjustments is described by Long as the *negotiation of meaning*. Negotiation of meaning is the process in which interactions are modified between or among conversational partners to help overcome communication breakdowns (Long, 1983a, 1983b; Long & Porter, 1985). Thus, cooperative interaction often results in mutual understanding (Pica, 1987). Gass et al. (2005) illustrated three

major ways of negotiation for meaning as in the following table:

Negotiation Strategy	Definition
Clarification Requests	In clarification requests, learners seek out extra information to clear up their misunderstanding. Question like 'What do you mean?' is often used in clarification request.
Confirmation Checks	Confirmation checks involve learners in verifying the meaning of their interlocutor's previous utterance. Questions like Do you mean X? is often used in such a situation.
Comprehension Checks	Comprehension checks involve speakers attempting to avert misunderstanding through the use of comprehension checks to ensure that their interlocutor has understood their intended message. The speaker may use 'Do you know what I mean?' to verify that their partner understands what is being said.

(Loewen, 2015, p. 42)

The purpose of this study is to find out the interactional patterns and negotiation modifications used in university English class in China. We want to confirm, besides IRF, if there are any other interactional patterns. We also want to know what negotiation modifications are being used in class and what are the focuses of the negotiation. On the basis of the literature review talked above, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the typical interactional structure in instructed setting in China?
2. What are the forms of negotiation of meaning used in instructed setting in China?
3. What aspects of language did the negotiation of meaning address?

III. METHOD

The present study is descriptive. That is to say, it tries to describe naturally occurring phenomena in classroom without experimental manipulation but it has a narrow scope of investigation. The study consists of three stages. The first stage is the observation of the classroom and the recording of teaching process in a normal university in China. The second stage is the transcription of the teaching process into text document and two other teachers then check the transcription. The third stage is identification of interactional structures and the negotiation strategies used in the interactional episodes. The fourth stage is a detailed description of the interactional structures and negotiation strategies found in the data.

A. Instructional Setting

Five intact classes of English major in a normal university in China were observed as the source of data with each class was recorded twice. The time we observed the class was at the beginning of the second term because the students were quite adapted to the learning environment and teacher's teaching methods after studying here for half a year. At the beginning of their freshmen semester, the students were evenly distributed into different classes according to the grades they got at the college entrance examination so there is no significant difference in their English proficiency among different classes. The course we chose is intensive reading with each lesson consists of 50 minutes. Totally we got 500 minutes of recording. The observer went into the class without intervening the teaching process. In intensive reading class in China, the activities usually included retelling, question and answer, reading comprehension activities, and translation. The topic of teacher-student interaction includes the explanation of the reading material and grammar focus.

B. Participants

Each class consists of 30 students with most of the students are females. Most of the students are from less developed areas thus their English proficiency is comparatively low. They seldom initiate interaction during class. The teacher initiates most of the interactions. The students are fee paying and teaching English will be their career after graduation, so generally they are highly motivated. All the teachers of these five classes have a master degree of linguistics or translation. One of them has taught for 20 years. Two of them have taught for 10 years. The other two teachers have taught for 5 five years. They are informed that the aim of the study is to examine classroom interaction.

C. Procedure

(1) Data Collection

A recorder was attached to the teacher in each class to record classroom interaction, including whole-class interaction and the teachers' interaction with individual student and groups. Thus this can ensure we can collect all the interactions teacher-students interaction. Totally 500 minutes of classroom interaction have been collected.

(2) Data Review

The recordings were first transcribed into text of approximately 50000 words. Two assistants reviewed the recordings and the texts to ensure the correctness. Then all the teacher-students interactions were picked out to form the data of this study.

(3) Identification of the Interactional Structures

We then identified the interaction episodes in which there are complete transactions, sequences or exchanges. Because the aim of the study is to find out the pattern of teacher-students interaction with the framework of

Conversation Analysis, thus any interaction episode which does not contain complete exchange is counted, such as when the teacher asks the student to close the window, or when the teacher asks questions, too many students answer the question so we can not hear clearly what they are talking about.

(4) Identification of the Negotiation of Meaning

According to the analyzing framework we mentioned in the last chapter, the researcher checked the interactional episodes to find out the strategies of negotiation of meaning used. In order to ensure correct strategies to be identified, the researcher and the assistant first made a clear criterion for each strategy, and then the researcher and the assistant independently coded a transcription sample of 50 minutes, with a resulting 92% agreement rate.

(5) Data Analysis

All these data were next subjected to detailed analysis. We first identified different types of exchanges according to the moves they have. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) have proposed descriptive framework for analysing spoken discourse, using classroom data as a starting point (Tsui, 2001, p. 8). A typical classroom exchange is made up of three moves: an *initiating move* from the teacher, a *responding move* from the student, and a *follow-up move* from the teacher (ibid.: 9). Three major acts probably occur in all forms of spoken discourse—*elicitation*, *directive*, and *informative*. They appear in classroom discourse as the heads of *initiating moves* and are very frequently realized by interrogatives, imperatives, and declaratives respectively. But as what we have found out, the most often used initiation act is *elicitation*, that is to say, the typical exchange in English class begins with teacher's questions.

The following example is a typical exchange found in our transcription.

T: What is the meaning of "beyond our imagination"? (elicitation act)

S: Cannot be imagined. (response act)

T: Yeah, it means cannot be imagined. (follow-up act)

This exchange begins with teacher's question. This kind of question is usually used to check if the students have a clear idea of the meaning of certain word or sentence.

The researcher then checked the interaction episodes that contain negotiation of meaning. Meaning negotiation is thought to be able to accelerate language acquisition because it can lead to comprehensible input (Long 1983; Pica et al 1987). The researcher found out when an exchange contains more than three move, it usually contains negotiation of meaning. For example:

S: I think Zhao Wei is a **victim**, we should forgive her.

T: A what? ← Clarification Request

S: A victim.

T: Good, I think it's good for you to use this word. (Lu, 2011, p. 88)

In this sequence, the teacher asked the student to make a clarification by using a tag question, this negotiation method we call *clarification request*, that is to say, to ask the student to state again the information he/she has just said because of misunderstanding or the missing of the point.

IV. RESULTS

A. The Typical Interactional Structures

Overall 210 interactional structures were identified in the 500 minutes teaching. Approximately teacher-student interaction occurred at a rate of every five minutes. The interactions were then divided into different types according to the structures they have. Generally speaking, the following structures have been found in the freshmen intensive reading classes.

(1) IRF Pattern

This is a three-move interaction. It is initiated with the teacher's question, the student's response, and then the feedback given by the teacher. e.g.,

T *What is your favorite fruit?* (initiation)

S *Apple.* (response)

T *Good.* (feedback)

According to our observation, IRF is the most frequently used discourse pattern in the class we observed. In a teacher-centered class, IRF is helping most of the students involve into teaching process. The differences lie in the third move. The teacher gives evaluation or feedback according to the correctness of students' answer: a positive evaluation for a correct answer, and a negative evaluation or a withholding for strategic reasons for an incorrect answer.

T: How many meaning does this word have? (initiation)

S: *Two.* (response)

T: *No, three.* (feedback)

In a traditional English class in China, the teacher is the instructor of the teaching plan and also arranges class activities. According to Barnes (1976), IRF interaction has a close relationship with "transmission mode of education", which indicates that the teacher reinforces his authority while transmitting knowledge. That means the teacher has a dominant function. The students cooperate with the teacher and they just receive the knowledge passively. They have little chance to exercise their communicative ability. In a word, the more control the teacher gives to the teaching process, the more frequently the IRF appears. Thus we may doubt the effectiveness of knowledge transmission in this

way since the students have only limited production.

(2) IRF(I)RF Pattern

The IRF(I)RF pattern contains four moves: initiation, response, feedback and initiation, response and feedback. It contains a re-initiation on the part of the teacher. For example,

- T: *What is the main idea of this paragraph?* (initiation)
 Ss: *It's about the return of his life.* (response)
 T: You think so? (feedback)
 I: *but what kind of life?* (initiation)
 Ss: *His dreamed life.* (response)
 T: Yes. (feedback)
 Or:
 T: *What is the meaning of "query" here?* (initiation)
 Ss: 询问. (response)
 T: No,
 T: *it has a negative meaning here.* (feedback)
 Ss: *To question, to doubt.* (response)
 T: Right

When a wrong answer is given, there are usually two major routes open to the teacher: he can stay with the same child until the student gets the right answer or he keeps the question and moves on to another child. It is usually realized by 'Yes', 'No' or a just a repetition of what the pupil just said (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, p. 54). The second initiation is realized by prompt, nomination, or clue.

(3) IR [I¹ R¹ (I² R²)] F Pattern

In this pattern, the teacher may not give feedback immediately after the student gives response to his initiation, instead he may go on with another initiation usually with a prompt or a clue to help the student to get the right answer. These steps will be repeated for several times, at last, the teacher gives his feedback. e.g.,

- T: *How do you answer if I ask "Do you mind my opening the window ?* (initiation)
 S: *Never mind.* (response)
 T: *Is that correct?* (initiation)
 S: *Not mind.* (response)
 T: *Here you should say "of course not", that is to say "I do not mind".* (feedback) (Lu, 2011, p. 87)

This pattern is also of high frequency in the class we observed. It shows the teacher deliberately leaves more opportunities for the students to have more language production. And this also is a trend in today's English class in China. More communication is happening. Teacher's initiation can also be seen as scaffolding for students to develop his language ability and they will also have more opportunities to participate in the teaching process.

(4) IR¹F¹ / R²F² Pattern

That means after the teacher's initiation, more than one student gives response and the teacher gives feedback respectively. We also call this pattern a *post-cooperative* structure. This pattern involves more students in classroom communication. So in a typical English class in China with at least 30 or more students in one class, this may be a good choice for the teacher to organize class communication. e.g.,

- T: After reading this paragraph, what words have you found to describe a person's personality? (initiation)
 S1: Considerate. (response 1)
 T: Yeah, Considerate. (feedback 1)
 S2: Thoughtful. (response 2)
 S3: Courageous. (response 3)
 T: Great, so you have found "considerate, thoughtful and courageous". (feedback 2)

Here, the question the teacher gave is a referential question or an open question. There is no definite answer to this kind of question. So we can see more students participate in the interaction. IR¹F¹ / R²F² Pattern is a very effective way teacher can use to enhance classroom communication.

B. Frequency of Interactional Structures

The distribution of these interactional patterns can give us a real picture of how teacher and students interact in teaching process. Thus we calculate the frequency of the interactional patterns we have talked about above.

TABLE 1
THE DISTRIBUTION OF INTERACTIONAL PATTERN

Interactional Pattern	Frequency
IRF Pattern	117
IRF(I ^b)RF Pattern	28
IR [I ¹ R ¹ (I ² R ²)] F Pattern	30
IR ¹ F ¹ / R ² F ² Pattern	35

We can see from the table that IRF is the most frequently used interactional pattern in the class we observed. It can be

explained by the fact that teacher has to finish a certain teaching task within a limited time span, so most of the time the teacher just gives the students a feedback or a confirmation to their answer. There is no time for further expansion of the communication. The more moves contained in an exchange, the more complicated the interaction is, so we can see that the number of IRF(I)RF Pattern, IR [$I^1 R^1 (I^2 R^2)$] F Pattern and IR^1F^1 / R^2F^2 Pattern is much less than IRF pattern.

Traditionally, English class in China is teacher-centered with less involvement on the part of the students. What we can see from the recording data is that teachers are trying to create more opportunities for students to make more language production. It is in the interaction forms of different topics are discussed, such as grammar, vocabulary or text understanding. Focus on form in the process of meaningful communication not only enhances language production on the part of the students but also raises their awareness of language forms.

C. Negotiation Modifications in Instructed Setting

Based on the transcriptions from the audio recordings, of all the 210 interactional patterns, 121 of them contain negotiation of meaning. After a detailed analysis of these episodes, totally six modification strategies have been identified. These strategies are used to promote mutual understanding and discuss language forms. We may say the negotiation of meaning leads to the focus of language form in which grammatical items are taught in a certain language context. In a traditional English class with at least 30 students maybe this can help to serve two aims, one is to promote communication, the other is to raise students' awareness of language forms.

(1) Clarification Requests

Clarification requests are utterances made by the listener to clarify what the speaker has said, which includes statements such as "I don't understand", wh-questions, yes/no questions, and tag questions (Long, 1980, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985b). e.g.

S: I think she is *on welfare*.

T: *On what?*

S: *On welfare*.

T: What do you mean by *on welfare*?

According to the data we have collected, the teacher makes most of the clarification requests. Sometimes the teacher can't hear clearly what the students said or doesn't get the students' meaning, so he may ask the students to repeat his/her preceding utterance, or sometimes the students can not get what the teacher has said because of a new word. Under this situation, clarification request is usually adopted.

(2) Confirmation Checks

Confirmation checks are those utterances made by the listener to confirm whether the preceding utterance has been heard and understood correctly, but they include repetition of all or part of the utterance accompanied by a rising intonation (Long, 1980; Pica & Doughty, 1985b). e.g.,

S: I think the author of this text has *a positive view in life*.

T: You mean she has *a positive outlook on life*?

S: Yeah.

In this example, the teacher makes the confirmation check just because she wants to make sure what she heard is correct or not. She just repeats part of the student's words while at the same time she corrects the mistake in student's expression by using a recast. Usually, during the teaching process, the students rarely adopt the strategy, because traditionally students in China are not inclined to ask questions. Most of the time they just receive knowledge passively. But we can see there is a trend in today's English class that teachers are encouraging students to get involved in the teaching process, either by asking them more questions or encourage them to pose their own questions.

(3) Comprehension Checks

Comprehension checks are those utterances made by the speaker to check whether the listener has understood the preceding utterance. It consists primarily of questions, either tag questions, repetition with rising intonation, or questions such as "Do you understand?" (Long, 1980, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985b). In our data, it is the most frequently used strategy in class. We also find that sometimes the teacher doesn't use this strategy for specific purpose, expression such as "Do you understand?" or "Have you got it?" are used as casually. e.g.,

(The teacher was talking about some cyberwords. He wants to check if the students understand what he said)

T: "Watermelon eaters" refers a big crowd of passive onlookers. *You know "Watermelon eaters?"*

Ss: Yeah.

Sometimes the teacher asks these questions although he knows the students understand what he said. He just wants to emphasize the target knowledge and help the students have a strong impression.

Here is another example:

T: Whatever you do you will have to think twice before you take any actions, or look before you leap. *Do you understand the meaning of look before you leap?*

So confirmation check is used as a way of confirmation or the teacher uses this strategy to adjust the pace of his teaching especially when new words or knowledge is being taught. The teacher needs to check if the students have understood what she/he said.

(4) Conversational Adjustments (Combination of the Above Three)

Conversational adjustments consist of the combination of the strategies described above. The teacher may ask a

series of questions to communicate with the students. Sometimes this kind of communication is just like a conversation. It looks very casual but the students can get teacher's information in the communication. e.g.,

T: What else did you do during the summer holiday?

S: Swimming.

T: If you are asked to describe this vacation using some words, what words will you use?

S: Sunshine,

T: *What?*

S: Sunshine.....seaside.....

T: *You went to the seaside?*

S: Yeah.

T: What's your feeling when you first saw the sea?

S: I felt I was so little.

T: Good, *because we are so small standing by the sea.* Right?

Ss: Yeah.

In this example, we can find the strategies of meaning negotiation we have talked about above. The teacher uses several questions to confirm, to check and to make sure he gets the student's idea. This kind of communication is more like a conversation, the teacher just wants to help the students practice their oral English and he can also correct student's mistake in a tactful way. So in the communication the students not only practice the words he learned but also have their mistakes corrected.

(5) Partial, Exact, Expanded, and Total Self-Repetition

This consists of the speaker's partial and exact repetitions of their own preceding utterances within five speaking turns (Pica & Doughty, 1985b). The speaker repeats what he/she said to make his/her expression clear. But some students repeat themselves just because of nervousness. e.g.,

T: Does anyone share his opinion?

Ss: I think....

T: *I mean do you agree with him?*

In this example, the teacher repeats himself by using different expression but with the same meaning. In the second sentence, *agree with sb.* has the same meaning with *share one's opinion* in the first sentence. He tries to make his idea clear to the students.

(6) Partial, Complete, Expanded, and Total Other-Repetition

These include not only partial and exact repetitions of lexical items from a speaker's preceding utterances within five speaking turns but also the expansions of the utterances. The purpose of using this strategy is for one hand to confirm the information, and for the other hand to emphasize the important information in previous utterances. e.g.,

T: *What can you get from this passage?*

S: I think this quick-fixed society is not benefitting for everybody.

T: *Benefitting. Good.*

S: *Yeah, We need to slow down.*

In this example, the teacher repeats the student's word to show his agreement with the student. Also the teacher thinks it is an appropriate word to describe the feature of the quick-fixed society. So here repetition serves as a way of confirmation.

The researcher calculated the frequency of different types of strategies used in the negotiation of meaning. This table can show us how these strategies are used in our English class. Sometimes teacher and students are using these strategies unconsciously, so a clear description of these strategies helps them realize what they said in class. It can also help them use these strategies more consciously in the future.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES OF STRATEGIES OF NEGOTIATION OF MEANING

Strategies of Negotiation of meaning	Frequency
Clarification Request	17 (14%)
Confirmation Checks	18 (12%)
Comprehension Checks	45 (37%)
Conversational Adjustments	16 (17%)
Self-Repetition	10 (8%)
Other-Repetition	15 (12%)

In table 2 we can find that comprehension checks take up the majority of all the strategies of negotiation of meaning. Expressions like "Do you understand?", "Have you got it?" or "got it?" are just pet phrases. Teacher usually can't get responses from the students so teachers should be cautious in using this strategy. The second strategy that teachers often use is confirmation check. Some of the confirmation checks contain recast. Recast is good in maintaining communication but sometimes it can not be noticed by the students. So if teacher can focus on form after giving a recast, it will be more effective.

D. Language Forms Being Focused in Negotiation of Meaning

Cooperative interaction is beneficial because it provides learners with comprehensible input. Of all the 121 interactional structures we identified from the data, 101 of them contain negotiation of form of certain grammatical items. We may find the following linguistic items:

- grammar: tense, verb morphology, subject-verb agreement, plurals
- vocabulary: the meaning of words, including single words and idioms
- text understanding: the meaning of the reading material

These three linguistic items are the major linguistic items in teacher-students interaction but different strategies are used. We may find the distribution of these linguistic items in the following chart:

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF THE TARGET LINGUISTIC ITEMS

strategies	CR	ConC	ComC	CA	SR	OR	Total
linguistic items							
grammar	5	10	10	9	/	3	37 (37%)
vocabulary	/	6	/	5	3	5	19 (19%)
text understanding	2	6	5	8	1	/	22 (22%)
spelling	5	/	2	/	/	2	9 (9%)
pronunciation	/	3	3	/	1	7	14 (14%)
Total	12(12%)	25(25%)	20(20%)	22(22%)	4(4%)	17(17%)	

(CR= Clarification Request; ConC= Confirmation Checks; ComC= Comprehension Checks; CA= Conversational Adjustments; SR= Partial, Exact, Expanded and Total Self-Repetition; OR= Partial, Complete, Expanded and Total Other-Repetition)

We may find from the table that the percentage of grammar as the target linguistic item is larger than the other two. The negotiation of the meaning of vocabulary accounts for 35%. Of all the strategies used in negotiation of meaning, clarification request and other repetition have the same percentage, both are 23%, and self repetition is the most rarely used strategy accounting only for 11%.

V. DISCUSSION

The aim of instructed SLA is to develop implicit or procedural knowledge for communicative competence in L2 learners. In many cases, explicit instruction results primarily in explicit knowledge of the information that was taught (Loewen, 2015, p. 38). So meaning-focused interaction may be a way of instruction that is more likely to lead to implicit knowledge and communicative competence (Loewen, 2015).

A. Patterns of Classroom Interaction

We first investigated the interactional patterns in university English classroom. The Interaction Approach to ISLA focuses mainly on input, negotiation of meaning and output (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Krashen's Monitor Model confirms the importance of communication in the classroom and states that the ability to use language for spontaneous communication develops through implicit learning mechanisms (Krashen, 1982, 2003). For most of the Chinese English learners, the classroom may be the only context in which they are able to engage in L2 communication, so the characteristics of interaction in the classroom most beneficial for L2 acquisition and the development of communicative competence have always been the target of instructed SLA.

Our data shows more teacher-students communication can be found in English classroom in our country although most of the time it is still a teacher-centered interaction. If we want to talk about L2 acquisition, input is a topic we can't avoid. Input in our English class comes mainly from two aspects, one is textbook, and the other is teacher's language. So looking into the way of how teacher and students interact may be a good way to find out how input intervene the process of learning and how it enters learners' cognitive systems.

One of the main findings of the study is that we can find distinct patterns of teacher-students interaction. No study up till now has identified the functions of these interactional patterns in promoting acquisition and how. The first finding we got is, of all these patterns, IRF is the most frequently used pattern, in which three moves can be identified. But this pattern is of little benefits in accelerating acquisition because questions used in the initiating move are usually display question and in the third move, teacher usually gives a positive feedback. That is to say, it can't help students notice, comprehend and take into their cognitive system the information in the input. Another important finding we got is the importance of extended interactional patterns although teacher uses them unconsciously. In these extended patterns like IRF(I^b)RF, IR [I¹ R¹ (I² R²)] F and IR¹F¹ / R²F², teacher uses questions and negative feedbacks to induce responses on the part of students. Although the number of these patterns is much less than IRF, still we can find focus of language forms in the interaction. So negative feedback and the correction of students' mistake in the previous utterance are of great importance to intervene the learning process and target students' attention to the form being focused in the interaction.

B. Strategies of Negotiation of Meaning

The second question of this study is to find out the strategies used in negotiation of meaning. Long (1991, 1996) argued that linguistic and situational context was not enough to make input comprehensible. Modified input during interaction is very important for L2 comprehension and development.

A number of studies have examined how negotiation of meaning occurs in the classroom (Gass et al., 2005). In her study, Gass found that different types of negotiation of meaning, such as confirmation check, clarification request and comprehension check can potentially help learners notice gaps between their own linguistic errors that result in communication breakdowns and the target-like forms that convey learner's intended meanings (Loewen, 2015). We identified six types of negotiation of meaning in English class we observed, among them comprehension checks are the most frequently used one although it does little contribution to language acquisition. This is different with Gass' finding.

According to our data, the target of the negotiation is about different aspects of language forms, such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling etc.. Through analyzing these episodes we found that among all the language forms, grammar is the focus of most of the meaning negotiation. So we can say grammar, as the focus of instruction is still a typical feature of English class in China. Another finding is that the process of negotiation not only directs students' attention to language form, but also accelerates language production. If they can notice the differences between their own utterance and teacher's utterance either from teacher's negative feedback or from communication breakdown, then output is not only the result of learning, but also as something that can contribute to L2 development. From our data, conversation adjustment is the negotiation strategy in which both focus on form and language production can be promoted.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has explored teacher-students interaction in instructional setting. Previous studies on classroom interaction just treat them as communication in situational context. No study up till now explores classroom interaction from the perspective of instructed second language acquisition. This study not only draws a picture of classroom interaction in English classroom in China, from interactional patterns to ways of negotiation of meanings, but also investigates in what way they influence acquisition. We found that among 210 interactional episodes, 121 of them contain negotiation of meaning, and among them 101 episodes are about different language forms. The researcher thinks that a clear knowledge about what is happening in classroom interaction can help language teachers attach definite target in designing teaching tasks or teacher-students interaction while at the same time reduce the number of aimless interactions.

This study, with such a limited sample, can't tell the story of classroom interaction in every detail. The author hopes future studies can include as different learning community as possible to investigate how to make full use of classroom interaction to promote acquisition.

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