

# From feedback to follow-up in the third turn of IRF sequences: A challenge to promote genuine interaction in EFL classes

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** In this paper, we present an analysis of the teacher-student interaction patterns in EFL classes found at a Colombian private university. **Methodology:** This analysis was made during a qualitative case study in which 36 class observations were conducted. Data were coded and further categorized with the help of Nvivo10 software. **Findings:** Teacher-student interaction was the most common type of classroom exchange. A three-turn sequence, commonly referred to as IRF, was chief among those interactions. In an IRF exchange the teacher (*I*nitiates the interaction, the student (*R*) *esponds* and the teacher provides (*F*)*eedback*. The third turn in IRF exchanges was scarcely used to follow-up on students' responses. Furthermore, we present the implications of using the third turn for both feedback and follow-up. **Conclusions:** Given the analysis made, the authors conclude that teachers should use the third turn for follow-up if the goal is to promote genuine linguistic interaction and engage students in meaningful communication.

**Keywords:** feedback, follow-up, interaction, IRF.

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## De la retroalimentación al seguimiento en el tercer turno de las secuencias IRF: Un desafío para promover la interacción genuina en las clases EFL

### Resumen

**Introducción:** en este artículo presentamos un análisis de los patrones de interacción maestro-alumno en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL por sus siglas en inglés) de una universidad privada colombiana. **Metodología:** este análisis se realizó durante un estudio de caso cualitativo en el que se efectuaron 36 observaciones de clase. Los datos obtenidos se codificaron y categorizaron con la ayuda del *software* Nvivo10. **Resultados:** la interacción maestro-alumno fue el tipo más común de intercambio en el aula, siendo la secuencia de tres pasos, comúnmente conocida como IRF por sus siglas en inglés, la forma reinante. En un intercambio IRF el maestro (I) *inicia* la interacción, el estudiante (R) *responde* y el maestro proporciona (F) *retroalimentación (feedback)*. El tercer paso de los intercambios IRF apenas se utilizó de forma escasa para hacer seguimiento a las respuestas de los estudiantes. Adicionalmente, presentamos las implicaciones de utilizar el tercer paso tanto para retroalimentación como para seguimiento. **Conclusiones:** dado el análisis realizado, los autores concluyen que los profesores deberían utilizar el tercer paso para hacer seguimiento si el objetivo es promover una genuina interacción lingüística y comprometer a los estudiantes en una comunicación significativa.

**Palabras clave:** retroalimentación, seguimiento, interacción, IRF.

## Do *feedback* ao acompanhamento no terceiro turno das sequências irf: Um desafio para promover interação genuína em aulas de efl

### Resumo

**Introdução:** neste trabalho, apresentamos uma análise dos padrões de interação professor-aluno em aulas de EFL realizadas em uma universidade privada colombiana. **Metodologia:** esta análise foi feita durante um estudo de caso qualitativo no qual foram realizadas 36 observações de aula. Os dados foram recolhidos e logo categorizados com a ajuda do *software* Nvivo10. **Resultados:** interações professor-aluno foram o tipo mais comum de troca em sala de aula. A sequência em três turnos, comumente conhecida como IRF, era a principal entre aquelas interações. Em uma troca IRF, o professor (*I*) *inicia* a interação, o aluno (*R*) *responde* e o professor dá o (*F*) *feedback*. O terceiro turno em trocas IRF era dificilmente utilizado para dar acompanhamento às respostas dos alunos. Além disso, apresentamos as implicações de usar o terceiro turno tanto para o *feedback* quanto para o acompanhamento. **Conclusões:** ao considerarmos a análise realizada, os autores concluem que os professores deveriam usar o terceiro turno para o acompanhamento se o objetivo é promover uma interação linguística genuína e engajar os alunos em uma comunicação significativa.

**Palavras-chave:** retroalimentação, acompanhamento, interação, IRF.

## Introduction

Early in our profession, teachers became aware of the importance of providing learners with opportunities for interacting. This was referred to by Allwright as a move in our field intended to get learners talking to each other (156). However, as our profession evolved so did our understanding of interaction and its impact on language learning. A great deal of scholarship was produced around the topic (Sinclair and Coulthard 1-34; Allwright 156-171; Rivers 3-16; Van Lier 139-184; Richards and Lockhart 138-157; Kumaravadivelu 101-130; Ellis, *The study* 775-835; see also Mackey and Polio) which helped us understand interaction not just as simply talking to each other but as communicating and negotiating meaning (Allwright 156). This awareness of the need to communicate in “unrehearsed situations, constructing meaning through genuine linguistic interaction” (Brown 47) opened up the path to what we know as Communicative Language Teaching which has been extensively implemented in Colombia (Truscott 83; Macías 188).

Oddly, promotion of interaction is still an aspect of the CLT that poses different challenges to the EFL teacher. This could be due in part to unequal relationships existent in classrooms (Candela 140; Behnam and Pouriran 116), the controlling role that the teacher plays, as well as the types of interaction promoted (Rivers 4-10). These challenges may translate into a lack of genuine linguistic interaction in the classroom. In this regard, some authors such as Rivers have pointed out that learners’ progress might become halted without proper interaction (9). In her own words, learners “know much but they cannot use it to express their own meaning” (9). Consequently, there is a need for educators to be aware of the interaction patterns they promote and the roles that emerge in their classrooms, and to question whether the interaction promoted is having a positive impact on their students’ process of learning a foreign language. In this paper, we will describe interaction patterns in EFL classrooms at a private university in Colombia. The paper discusses the initiation-response-feedback sequence (hereafter IRF) (Sinclair and Coulthard as reported by Van Lier 147-156) and presents the possible implications of those sequences. Our goal is to introduce suggestions for teachers to better promote language learning when interacting with their students.

## Theoretical background

In this paper, we attempt to analyze different teacher-student interaction events and the impact they have on the development of authentic oral communication. Therefore, prior to the analysis of such interaction events, we will discuss how interaction, teacher-student interaction and IRF sequences are understood within the scope of this paper.

### Interaction

Interaction is the first element on this theoretical background. It has been defined by Brown as “the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other” (212). It is also considered as having a positive impact on learning (Gass and Mackey 6; Hall and Walsh 187). For Rivers, learners benefit from interacting, as they get involved in situations in which they can construct meaning by focusing on “conveying and receiving authentic messages” (4). This exchange of authentic messages, in turn, forces learners to produce “more accurate and appropriate language” as they participate in negotiated communication (Hedge 13), hence the need of authentic messages to promote genuine linguistic interaction.

To label interaction as genuine two intertwined properties are required, to wit: symmetry and contingency. The combination of such properties ensure effective use of language for communicative purposes. Symmetry refers to “equal participation rights and duties” given to all participants when interacting (Van Lier 140). Contingency relates to interconnectedness of utterances among speakers and the topic discussed. Van Lier explains how contingent interaction provides a sense of unexpectedness, as the speaker and the hearer connect utterance to utterance while interacting (171). To sum up, symmetry has to do with speakers contributing equally during an interaction while contingency is what makes interaction real, as it provides a sense of natural improvisation when speaking (Baynham 26).

As noted before, interaction is a process that involves more than taking turns while speaking. It also goes beyond traditional interactional activities promoted in class that are the result of rehearsed activities, drilled dialogues and unreal performances (Herazo 49; Rosado 168). Interacting implies that speakers have the right to participate when they want,

propose the topics they want and co-construct meaning as they interact without necessarily knowing what the other speakers will say. Consequently, teachers should create communicative activities that present an assemblage of these properties in view of the benefits that meaningful interaction has on language learning (Rivers 9).

### Teacher-student interaction

The second element on this theoretical background has to do with teacher-student interaction. According to Ellis, classroom interaction involves the “discourse jointly constructed by the learner and his interlocutors” (*Understanding* 127). In a language classroom, those interlocutors are mainly the student’s peers and the language teacher. Therefore, student-student (ss-ss) interaction and teacher-student (T-s) interaction are the two commonly types of communication found in EFL classrooms. However, for the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the patterns behind teacher-student interaction and its impact on foreign language learning.

Teacher-student interaction is typically established between the teacher and a student or a group of students, or even between the teacher and the whole class (T-c) (Luu Trong Tuan and Nguyen Thi Kim Nhu 30). EFL teachers traditionally initiate and sustain interaction by means of implementing a variety of questions, which differ in their intention, and which have been classified in several ways (Suter 2-3; Ellis, *The study* 797-798). Brown classifies questions into display and referential questions (219). According to him, display questions are aimed at obtaining information which the teacher knows in advance. These kinds of questions are mainly focused on grammatical features or vocabulary and tend to elicit single or short responses. The following example taken from a foreign language class in a private university in Colombia illustrates the use of display questions:

TEACHER: What is the past tense of do?

STUDENT: Did.

TEACHER: And the past participle?

STUDENT: Done. (Class observation to teacher Mariana<sup>1</sup>, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)

In this example, the teacher asks two questions—both of them focused on grammar—that require a short response and whose answers the teacher already knows.

Referential questions, on the other hand, “request information not known by the questioner” (Brown 219) and their goal is to obtain genuine information (Ellis, *The study* 797). Thus, referential questions are authentic and help speakers be engaged in conversation, favoring language learning. The following example, which takes place in a discussion activity to present the topic of unusual jobs, illustrates the use of referential questions:

TEACHER: Pedro, which job do you consider interesting?

STUDENT: eee dentist, a pilot, y [and] astronaut

TEACHER: And which one you consider boring? Which one you don’t like?

STUDENTS: Nurse. (Class observation to teacher Laura, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014)

As noted, the teacher does not know the answers in advance. The teacher aims to engage students in the topic by means of asking learners to express their personal views, favoring, in turn, the use of the target language.

It is worth stating that some authors acknowledge that both referential and display questions are to some extent relevant and useful in language classrooms (Brown 219). However, several studies have shown that foreign language teachers have a tendency to pose more display than referential questions. For instance, González and Arias came to the conclusion that educators devoted most of their class time to teach grammar by means of asking display questions (5). Furthermore, Long and Sato found that non-native teachers in ESL classrooms ask almost four times more display questions than referential ones (253-279). Along the same line, Suter presents an analysis of three lessons taught by four teachers (4-8). All of the observed teachers asked more display than referential questions. Another research conducted by Pica and Long (qtd. in Behnam and Pouriran 121) concluded that, since teachers asked more display questions, there is “less negotiation in classrooms.”

### IRF sequence

Sinclair and Coulthard have proposed a model for analyzing classroom exchanges (1-34). According

1 This is a pseudonym. They will be used hereafter to protect the identity of participants.

to the authors, there are two types of exchanges: Boundary exchanges and teaching exchanges. The former indicates the beginning of a transaction and/or a metastatement about the transaction; the latter usually takes place for the purpose of asking, answering and providing feedback. This teaching exchange has become what we know as IRF, which is the last element on this theoretical background. IRF exchanges account for almost 70% of all classroom interactions (Wells 2). It refers to a three-turn T-S interaction in which the teacher (*i*)nitiates the conversation; then, the student gives a (*R*)esponse; and finally, the teacher provides him/her with (*F*)eedback. Nevertheless, the third turn of the sequence, i.e. feedback, has been recently subject to debate. Some researchers believe that the third turn in IRF interactions is at times mechanical and constraining when only implemented for assessment purposes (Walsh, "Construction or obstruction" 19; Kumaravadivelu 116; Lei 76; Herazo 56). To compensate for this limited use of the third turn, some authors such as Wells (35) and Nystrand (qtd. in Hall and Wash 191) have suggested that this turn could, in fact, promote genuine interaction if the "F" turn varies in intention from "Feedback" to "Follow-up." This is of paramount importance to this paper since the distinction between IR(F)eedback and IR(F)ollow-up will be the point of departure in our findings and later in the arguments we expect to put forward.

During an IR(F)eedback, the third turn usually comes in the form of a statement or comment made by the teacher about the student's second turn. Van Lier points that during this third turn, the student "finds out if the answer corresponds with whatever the teacher 'has in mind'" (149). Van Lier considers that IR(F)eedback could have a positive effect on classroom dynamics (150) as teachers are given the opportunity to take students in the direction desired according to objectives set in the academic program. Therefore, by using an IR(F)eedback, educators could help students to be connected with specific topics and to receive immediate feedback.

During an IR(F)ollow-up, the third turn usually comes in the form of a referential question that aims at providing the learner with the chance of elaborating on whatever idea he/she mentioned during the second turn. This type of IR(F)ollow-up has some benefits. For some authors, such as Mortimer and Machado (435-436), it provides students with opportunities to elaborate their comment or helps teachers elicit new thoughts from learners. An IR(F)ollow-up

also fosters learning given that the third turn is used to deepen the student's responses, to ask them to clarify or elaborate answers, or even to connect their ideas with personal experiences (Wells qtd. in Hall and Walsh 190). Other authors, such as Nystrand, expand the concept of the third turn, introducing the idea of "high-level evaluation," in which the teacher included a follow-up question in the third turn, giving students the opportunity to extend their answers and therefore allowing him/her to "take ownership of ideas" (qtd. in Hall and Wash 191).

## Research design

In this paper, we give an account of a qualitative exploratory case study research that was carried out at the language institute of a private university in Colombia. In this research, an exploratory case study is understood as an approach that allows to study a case in a bounded system (Yin 13; Creswell 73). The main objective of the research was to explore the beliefs that EFL teachers hold in relation to the Communicative Approach and to relate those beliefs to their pedagogical practices. According to Brown, the Communicative Approach can be divided into seven categories, which served as the basis for all the research design. One of the categories has to do with the role of the teacher (46-47). For Brown, one of the teacher's role is to promote genuine linguistic interaction (47). Therefore, given that the aim of this paper is to discuss IRF exchanges and their implication for genuine linguistic interaction, we will purposefully report on the data related to interaction collected during class observations.

## Participants

We invited 6 EFL teachers to be part of this research. Two of them were full-time, 2 part-time and 2 adjunct teachers. Participants were selected with the help of a stratified purposeful sampling technique as suggested by Patton (240). All the participants have an undergraduate EFL teaching degree. Two of them hold a master's degree in education-related areas and two are pursuing that degree. All the participants speak Spanish as their native language and are fluid English speakers. Also, they all have taken courses in languages different from English. All the participants have an average of more than 4 years of teaching experience. Before concluding, it is important to mention that all participants agreed to voluntarily

participate in this research and were informed about all the important aspects of this study as well as the implication of their participation in it.

### Data collection and analysis

As mentioned before, in order to analyze interaction patterns, we will focus on the data collected through class observations carried out during this research. To observe the classes, we selected one course from each of the participants and video-taped them for five weeks. Each course had two classes a week; each class lasted about one hour and a half. During the first two weeks, we video-taped them but did not use the recordings since the main purpose of these two weeks was to allow participants and their students to get familiar with the presence of the camera. In the next three weeks, we continued video-taping and used a protocol we prepared that would allow us to focus on the aspects concerning the Communicative Approach—including interaction (see Appendix). That is, we planned to observe 36 classes in total so as to have data that would be trustworthy of what teachers were doing in their classes. As we mentioned before all the participants and their students signed a consent form to allow us to video-tape their classes.

After the data were collected, all the class observations were transcribed. In order to analyze interaction patterns we used the model suggested by Sinclair and Coulthard (1-34). Thus, we individually classified classroom exchanges into boundary and teaching exchanges. Additionally, we classified each teaching exchange as IR(F)eedback and IR(F)ollow-up. Then, the researchers discussed their codes in groups. All these discussions allowed us to refine the codes and get to the final categories in the data analysis. Nivo10, a qualitative research software, was used to analyze the data collected.

### Research trustworthiness

A special note needs to be made in regards to the trustworthiness of this research project. As researchers, we take on the notion that Guba (79-80) puts forward in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to ensure credibility of this research report, we used source triangulation that would allow us to have a better and valid understanding of interaction patterns. In regards to the extent to which the findings are replicable and transferable to other situations, we assume

that enough information was provided about the context, participants and design of this research to meet transferability and dependability expectations. Finally, to enhance confirmability of this research, we used investigator triangulation to avoid biases in the collection, analysis and reporting of data.

### Findings

The objective of this paper is to present and analyze different teacher-student interaction encounters observed in a Colombian private university. First and foremost, the data suggest that most of the interaction present in the classroom is teacher–student rather than student-student. In this regard, the data point that out of 1549 exchanges in the classes observed, 1539 (93.3%) correspond to T-C/T-SS exchanges whereas 10 (0.7%) correspond to SS-SS exchanges (see figure 1). That is, there is approximately 1 SS-SS exchange per 154 T-SS/T-C exchanges.

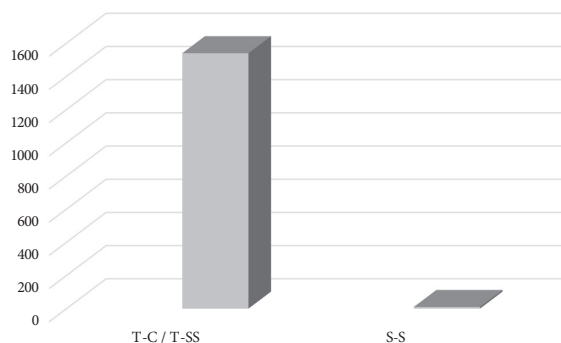


Figure 1. Types of classroom interaction

Source: classes observed.

This finding supports the conclusions reached by other researchers, such as Musumeci 293 and Fazio and Lyster (qtd. in Gündüz 1155), who state that most of the interaction patterns found in English classrooms are T-SS/T-C exchanges. Hence, it seems that classrooms are mainly teacher-centered. This clear gap in the types of classroom interaction might indicate that the student still does not have the right to participate and co-construct meaning through the interaction with his/her peers. These archetypal classroom roles limit meaningful learning (Herazo 59) and students' progress in achievement (Rivers 9).

From these T-SS/T-C exchanges, 488 (31.7%) can be classified as boundary in comparison to 991 (68.3%) which could be classified as teaching (see

figure 2). That is, the majority of the T-ss/T-C exchanges correspond to teaching exchanges.

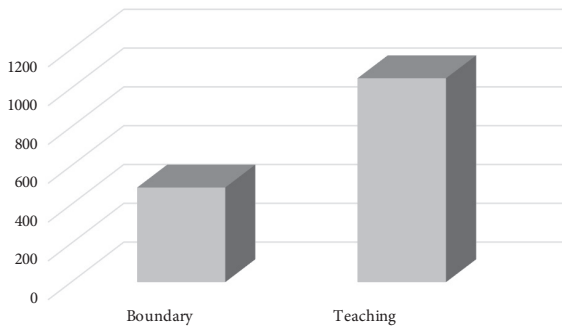


Figure 2. Types of exchanges

Source: classes observed.

During our study and based on the data, we further classified such teaching exchanges as IR(F)eedback and IR(F)ollow-up. The data suggest that the majority of exchanges found correspond to IR(F)eedback (84.5%) in contrast to only 15% of IR(F)ollow-up (see figure 3). This reassures the controlling role of the teacher and the limited promotion of authentic linguistic interaction. In the next subsections of this paper, we introduce some examples of these IRF exchanges along with the analysis of those exchanges and their implications.

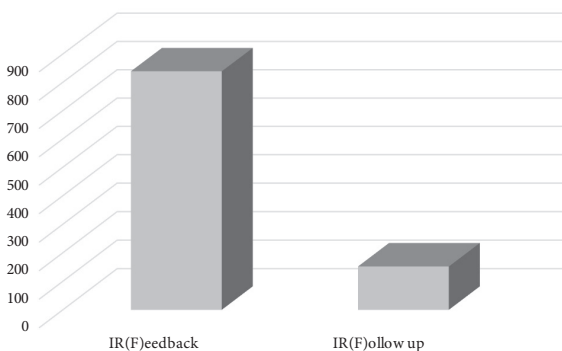


Figure 3. Types of IRF

Source: classes observed.

### IR(F)eedback

As shown in table 1, the first type of IRF we identified was an IR(F)eedback in which the teacher (1) initiates the encounter asking a display question, then (2) the student responds what the teacher expects, and

finally (3) the teacher provides feedback on the student’s response:

Table 1. IR(F)eedback. Sample 1

IRF exchange 1	Turn 1	T	Who is a busy person?
	Turn 2	S1	Is a person who has to do a lot of things.
IRF exchange 2	Turn 3/ Turn 1	T	Excellent. Noisy? It’s a person who?
	Turn 2	S2	who screaming ...
	Turn 3	T	yes, people noisy, cheerful, extremely happy.

Source: class observation to Cristina, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

In the excerpt above, there are two IR(F)eedback exchanges. In the first IR(F)eedback exchange, the teacher asks the display question *who is a busy person?* It is a display question since she does not really want to know the meaning of the noun phrase “a busy person.” Rather, her main intention is to check the student’s command of the phrase. During the second turn, the student provides a proper answer: “Is a person who has to do a lot of things.” Although this sentence lacks the subject, the student’s answer shows he knows the meaning of the noun phrase and a command of the language to provide a definition. After that, in the third turn, the teacher uses the word *excellent* to provide the student with a non-specific positive feedback. Immediately after the feedback, the teacher initiates the second IR(F)eedback exchange with another student. This exchange resembles the first one. That is, the teacher asks for the meaning of a word, the student provides a definition and then the teacher provides the student with a non-specific positive feedback, this time followed by a synonym perhaps to ensure comprehension. Although the excerpt presents a clear illustration of two IRF exchanges, the third turn in both of them is only used to provide feedback which, as we will argue, does not constitute an example of authentic interaction.

Genuine interaction is not promoted in the two IR(F)eedback exchanges since they lack the elements of symmetry and contingency. In the first place, the teacher is the only person in control of questioning, which evidences an absence of symmetry, as proposed by Van Lier (140); that is, an inequality of participation, rights and duties. The teacher decides who and when students speak, controlling not only turn taking but also discourse, which is a limitation already discussed by Walsh when analyzing IRF (*Classroom interaction* 20). At the same time, the exchange lacks

elements of contingency, as the teacher's third intervention is limited to provide a confirmation. If the teacher had included a follow-up question such as "are you or anybody in your family a busy person?" she could have promoted authentic interaction. The element of unexpectedness would have ended up in a conversation that might have engaged both participants. Thus, although both exchanges can be classified as IRF, when the third turn is limited to feedback, the IRF exchange does not seem to be effective in the development of authentic interaction. In the words of Rosado "if the feedback, in the IRF pattern, continues to be focused on providing just corrective feedback from a deficit perspective of learning and not from a learning-generating one, the learner opportunities might be reduced" (170).

Our findings seem to be supported by other researchers who agree that the implementation of this type of IRF interaction is mechanical and restricted. Kumaravadivelu explains that during the third turn the teacher limits his response to an evaluating comment such as "that's right," and then, moves to the next question, which clearly restricts the students' chances to express their views (116). Lei and Herazo also found limitations when using this type of IR(F)eedback. The former concluded that when implementing these IR(F)eedback in lessons, students lost motivation, as teachers just evaluated if the answers provided were either "right" or "wrong" (Lei 76). The latter concluded that "the third turns of the IRF instances are evaluative— something very rare in authentic conversation; the conversation is not oriented towards exchanging meaningful relevant contents, but towards verifying knowledge" (Herazo 56).

The following is another example of IR(F)eedback). The excerpt presented in table 2 belongs to an English class in which permanent and temporary situations are being discussed; we will illustrate this type of IR(F)eedback and will discuss its effect on promoting authentic interaction. The exchanges presented emerged once the teacher had explicitly taught the use of the simple present tense and present progressive to her English students.

In the excerpt above, there are three IR(F)eedback exchanges. In the first IRF, the teacher asks the referential question "What are you doing, Juliet?" The question could be classified as a referential question, as it seems to seek genuine information from the student. However, the teacher knows what Juliet is doing; she just expects her student to use present continuous in the answer. During the second turn,

the student replies "I'm stay in class." The student's answer shows an understanding of the question and the language necessary to provide an answer. Then, during the third turn, the teacher uses the words "I'm in the English class, OK?" to provide the student with explicit feedback in the form of recast. Immediately, after providing feedback, the teacher initiates two new IR(F)eedback exchanges with two other students. Once again, the teacher initiates the exchanges with referential questions, the students reply based on their personal experiences and the teacher ends the exchanges providing corrective feedback; this time by means of eliciting complete ideas from students. This could suggest that the teacher's intention is to emphasize proper use of grammar and syntax.

**Table 2.** IR(F)eedback. Sample 2

<b>IRF exchange 1</b>	Turn 1	T	What are you doing, Juliet?
	Turn 2	S1	I'm stay in class.
<b>IRF exchange 2</b>	Turn 3/ Turn 1	T	I'm in the English class, OK? Where do you study, Victor Hugo?
	Turn 2	S2	In this university.
	Turn 3	T	Could you please say the complete expression?
	Turn 4	S2	I study in this University.
<b>IRF exchange 3</b>	Turn 5/ turn 1	T	Very good. OK, Juliana. Where do you live?
	Turn 2	S3	In Floridablanca.
	Turn 3	T	The complete expression is?
	Turn 4	S3	I live in Floridablanca.
	Turn 5	T	I live in Floridablanca, very good.....

Source: class observation to Laura, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Although the previous example of IR(F)eedback is introduced by means of asking referential questions, it does not constitute an example of authentic interaction for different reasons. Firstly, referential questions are aimed at obtaining genuine information (Brown 219). However, in the excerpts presented, the teacher's interventions during the third turn indicate a focus on proper use of language rather than a genuine interest in the students' responses. Since the topic discussed during the class is the use of present simple versus present continuous, the teacher emphasizes appropriate use of language structures. Therefore, the referential questions, in this case, do not serve their purpose and do not constitute examples of contingent or genuine interaction. Instead of focusing on grammar, the teacher could have



promoted authentic interaction by means of asking questions related to the students' daily routines, hobbies and temporary situations; for example, in the first exchange, the teacher could have asked if the student had more classes after or if she had had a busy day. This type of questions might have engaged the student in an authentic interaction. On the contrary, the limitation of using the third turn for feedback is what some authors such as Mortimer and Machado have referred to as "authoritative" (435). This term is used to describe a sequence that is focused on evaluation and does not contribute to real interaction but is rather meant as a corrective feedback that limits student participation. Along the same line, Lin claimed that, when implementing IR(F)eedback), students are left without "any possibility of developing an interest in English as a language and culture that they can appropriate for their own communicative and socio-cultural purposes" (qtd. in Hall and Walsh 189).

### IR(F)ollow-up

The second type of IRF found in the classes observed, unlike the previous one, is an exchange in which the teacher (1) initiates the encounter asking a referential question, then, (2) the student responds the question based on personal experiences, and finally, (3) the teacher asks follow-up questions, engaging students in meaningful conversation. This third type of IR(F)ollow-up favors both contingency and symmetry, as students have an active role in which they act as equals with their teachers by means of sharing personal experiences and asking questions. The following excerpt, which belongs to an English class in which entertainment is the topic of discussion (see table 3), illustrates this type of IRF. The teacher asks students about leisure activities and all participants are engaged in a conversation that favors meaning and language use.

In the previous excerpt, we can identify two IR(F)ollow-up exchanges. In the first IRF, the teacher asks students what they do to entertain. The use of this referential question, which seeks for unknown information, suggests the teacher's interest in learning about her students' lives. During the second turn, the student replies "play soccer with my brother." The learner's answer provide personal information and shows command of language, albeit without the subject of the sentence. Then, during the third turn, the teacher promotes further discussion by asking the follow-up question "Do you play soccer with your brother? Isn't it dangerous?" This question indicates

that the teacher may be interested as she continues asking about the nature of the activities done by the student and remains asking questions such as "Ok, how old is your brother?". These questions keep the student involved in the discussion. Once the short conversation is finished, the teacher initiates a new IR(F)ollow-up exchange with another student in the same fashion. Although this time, the teachers' third turn includes information about her personal life when saying "Ok, in my case, I go to the gym. Yes, for me is delicious dancing classes (sic)." This comment triggers an interest in the student, who takes an active role to ask the teacher where she went. Hence, as shown in the finding, when the teacher takes the third turn beyond traditional feedback and turns it into a space for further discussion and elaboration, features of symmetry and contingency emerge along with an emphasis on meaning and use of language.

**Table 3.** IR(F)ollow-up

<b>IRF exchange 1</b>	Turn 1	T	Super delicious, go to the swimming pool. What about you, my princess?
	Turn 2	S1	Play soccer with my brother
	Turn 3	T	Do you play soccer with your brother? Isn't it dangerous?
	Turn 4	S1	No.
	Turn 5	T	Ok, how old is your brother?
	Turn 6	S1	7
<b>IRF exchange 2</b>	Turn 7/ Turn 1	T	Ok, it's safe. What about you? What do you do to entertain?
	Turn 2	S2	I listen music.
	Turn 3	T	Ok, you listen to the music. Ok, in my case, I go to the gym. Yes, for me is delicious dancing classes.
	Turn 4	S2	Where do you go?
	Turn 5	T	Bodytech, here. And also there are fight and combat classes that are so delicious.

Source: class observation to Mariana, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014.

This finding supports views from Wells 35; Mortimer and Machado 435-436; Hall qtd in Hall and Wash 191; and Kumaravadivelu 118-119, who concluded that IRF could positively affect language environments if changes in the third turn of the exchange were implemented. At the same time, the excerpt presents a clear example of how IRF can be enriched as suggested by Van Lier when concluding that "by moving away from a focus on display, repetition, and regurgitation, IRF use may be beneficial in

securing student's engagement and building a bridge towards more contingent forms of instructional interaction" (156).

## Conclusions and pedagogical implications

In conclusion, the promotion of genuine linguistic interaction is still an area that poses various challenges to the EFL teacher. First, in the majority of the classes observed, teachers seemed not to be able to make their students the center of their classes. Furthermore, we found that the third turn in an IRF sequence is mostly used to rate student's knowledge and to evaluate appropriate use of language. Consequently, student's contributions seem limited, as the purpose of communication is no longer to convey meaning but to display knowledge. This makes encounters ineffective in the development of authentic interaction. Lastly, we also found that when the IR(F)ollow-up was implemented, the classroom encounters observed resembled every day interaction, as both speakers were nurturing from each other in natural conversation.

The pedagogical implications that can be drawn from these findings are threefold:

First, the data presented above indicated that interaction is mainly controlled by the teacher. ss-ss interaction was hardly promoted. This implies that teachers should give up their controlling role in class, however hard it seems to be (Fajardo 23). A possible way to do so is by creating scenarios that would allow students to engage with their own peers without direct intervention of the teacher. If learners are given the right to participate and co-construct meaning with their peers, they can benefit from genuine linguistic interaction and might progress in their language learning.

Second, the data also suggested that there are more IR(F)eedback than IR(F)ollow-up. This might indicate that the majority of T-s interaction is directed towards an accurate use of the target language. Although, at times accuracy is important, it should not be the only concern when interacting with students. Teachers should also ask students to elaborate, ask for unknown information, care for the stories they might tell, encourage them to state points of views, i.e. engage in real communication regardless of the mistakes students may make.

Finally, the data indicated that the use of IR(F)ollow-up favors contingency and symmetry. Teachers can favor both elements by asking referential questions.

As shown in the data, if teachers ask more referential questions, teachers and students acquire the same rights and responsibilities creating, in turn, a sense of unexpectedness in the interactions they have. This type of interaction resembles authentic communication, hence the benefits it has for language learners.

To sum up, learners can better engage in conversation and better use language for real communication if we as teachers are committed to relinquish control during the third turn sequences and allow students to explore with language (Fajardo 23). By doing this, we will favor meaning over appropriateness and will create more opportunities to make the target language use meaningful, ensuring in consequence naturalness in conversation.

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