2021 International Conference on Educational Innovation and Philosophical Inquiries (ICEIPI 2021)
Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Educational Innovation and Philosophical Inquiries (ICEIPI 2021), Part 1
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/1/ICEIPI_156

A Conversation Analysis of the Repair Strategies and Use of Turn-Taking Practices in an IELTS Preparation Class

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Keywords: conversation analysis, turn-taking, repair strategies, IELTS speaking class, EFL class.

Abstract: This research uses conversation analysis to investigate an institutional discourse within a 28-day university level IELTS preparation class. The goals of this research are to explore: a) repair strategies taken by students and the teacher b) the pattern of turn-taking in an IELTS training class of speaking test. Findings show that the pattern of this result-oriented training class is IRF cycle, and that the most popular strategy applied by the teacher is recast.

1. Introduction

This article explores the characteristics of a preparation class for IELTS (International English Language Testing System) speaking test using the method of conversation analysis. The emphasis of the IELTS class draws on test score improvement in a short time instead of cultivating communicative skills in a more time-consuming way, which is indicated as a prominent feature of the EFL class.

IELTS has become one of the most recognizable tests in China. There was an estimated number of 300,000 students in mainland China signed up for IELTS in 2017 (https://www.chinaielts.org/whats_new/media_centre/84199.shtml). Among those test-takers, most of them decided to study in training schools, namely New Oriental, Global IELTS school, Meten English, which are specially designed for students who want to achieve their language goals within several months or even weeks. There is little research in IELTS test preparation and training classes with a focus on the result-oriented context in China, where the instructor put the final outcome of the test prior to the improvement of communicational competence of language learners by using approximately the same proportion of English and Chinese in English speaking classes. Therefore, this article investigates more details regarding class like this from the perspective of class interaction, using conversation analysis as a vigorous tool.

1.1. What is IELTS

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test is an English language test designed for non-native speakers of English from varying backgrounds worldwide. IELTS test involved four sub-tests: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, which is to examine the comprehensive English

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DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/1/ICEIPI_156

ability of test-takers and is getting more popular due to its high reliability and validity (Quaid, 2018) [7]. Rabab'ah (2015) [8] mentions that L2 learners use the strategies such as paraphrase, self-repair, and clarification requirements to remedy their linguistic deficiencies without explicitly knowing them and keep the communication channel open with participants in this conversation. The EFL classroom is not only a place where grammar and language knowledge is practiced but also "language is used meaningfully" (Joan Kang Shine, 2006) [10], while IELTS class is result-oriented.

As for an IELTS preparation class, though it is set to improve students' comprehensive English level and meet the relevant requirements of foreign universities, with its applicable object, preparing students to study abroad, this training class is more result-oriented, addressing more techniques and strategies to win a higher score in the IELTS speaking test.

The major differences between EFL classes and this IELTS training class lie in two aspects. First, the duration of time varies. EFL classes in general hold for at least one semester or even longer while this preparation class for IELTS lasts only 28 days. The second distinction is that the EFL class is less structural than the IELTS class. Students are more restricted and have less time to practice in Chinese IELTS preparation class given the rigid and tight schedule while teachers are also challenged to disseminate knowledge and cover many aspects as much as possible in a short period. In contrast, in EFL classes, teachers apt to let students have discussions more often and answer their questions in detail.

1.2. Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis is a vigorous methodology to understand the organization of talk and conversation in our daily life. It is originated from Ethnomethodology, proposed by Garfinkel, which is used to study the dynamic social order of interaction. In the 1970s, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) [1] set a collaborative foundation for conversation analysis in researching the details of orderliness in a mundane conversation, such as through telephone, thus suggesting the social distribution of our cognition and being used as an analytical resource with respect to different languages and social structure research, which is one of the most seminal studies in first-generation CA (Lerner, 2004) [11]. The collected data can be gathered in data sessions (Antaki, Biazzi, Nissen,&Wagner, 2008) [12], which serve to find some new phenomenon or a specific phenomenon is used in an institutional or some other specific environments after a close analysis in actions and turn design in these data sessions. CA often uses comparison and contrast to observe the sequences and turn structure, such as comparing the response particle "oh" with other response tokens for instance, Yeah or Mm, which also shows acknowledgment of the prior turn,(Gardner, 2001) [13] and also exemplifies how oh and other tokens to show surprise following the prior talk (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2006) [14].

1.3. Conversation Analysis Applied in SLA

CA has been used in SLA (second language acquisition) research given to the notion that talk can achieve an effective and comprehensible input, which is a focus of second language acquisition mainstream research (Numa Markee,2000) [17]. By the methods of audio and video taking, researchers can gain detailed conversational data and utilized them as specific instances to capture the sequential mechanisms from naturally occurring data (Kasper & Wagner, 2014) [3]. One category of conversation, adjacency pairs (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson,1977) [2], as a basic building block of a sequence, contains the functions of starting or closing a conversation (Rylander, 2014) [4] and expressing the understanding and projection of participants (Wong & Waring, 2010) [5]. It can help teachers and researchers to better monitor the details of class interaction and

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investigate how the institutional conversation is organized and how participants orient to the conversation in the class as well.

1.4. Transcriptions of CA

Kasper and Wagner (2014) [3] contend that CA transcriptions differ from other forms of transcriptions in many social sciences, given they are tightly related to the ways of people's speech. CA analyzes data from an emic perspective, which means "no subjective opinions about meaning are expressed by the researcher when dealing with data. (Rylander, 2014) [4]" The main function of transcription is to code and note devices for the sake of accessing information in the recordings. Therefore, fine-grained transcriptions and vivid video recordings can provide us information regarding turn-taking, repair, sequence organization, gestures (Mi-Suk Seo and Irene Koshik, 2010) [15], which sometimes replace relevant talk after a TCU (turn constructional unit: a language group consists of sentential, clausal, phrasal, lexical, or even smaller elements) (Markee, 2000) [17] or co-occur with talk to be indicated as a repair-initiator. Other findings in the EFL class assisted by CA were studies in sequential design, the nature of the response, and also the use of multimodel resources (Duran, Jacknick, 2020) [16]. How teachers initiate a post-task discussion and how teachers react to non-uptake of students were also discussed in this study. Though mainstream in SLA emphasizes on quantitative research instead of focusing on the details in the process of teaching and learning, CA offers a possibility of investigating the sequence and structure of a particular institutional conversation. It has the potential to instruct teachers to adjust their teaching methods and better assist them to understand situations occurring in an English language class (CHEN Yan; CUI Yuanyuan, 2012) [6].

Given the fact that little research has been done relating the topic of IELTS preparation class in mainland China, this article investigates how the IELTS speaking training class, which is largely aimed at improving the score of students in a short period of time, unfolds in several perspectives concerning the structure of the class, turn-taking, repetition and self-repair from observation of class interaction between teacher and students and among students themselves. The objective of this study is to answer these questions:

a) What is the pattern of turn-taking in the IELTS training class?
b) What strategies do students and teachers take to repair themselves?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The data was collected from a class taught by a male NNS from China, Mr. Wang, who had taught courses at English training schools in China for approximately 3 years. He earned a master's degree in translation studies at Durham University and also held a CELTA (Cambridge English Language Assessment) qualification then he came back to China dedicating in IELTS training programs. The stated objectives of this class were to improve students' speaking ability in 28 days. Class members were 23 undergraduates and one graduate from Chongqing University, who planned to further their study abroad in the near future or have a chance to be admitted to a graduate program by a better university in China. 20 students, over half of the class participants passed CET-4 (College English Test – band four) and one passed both CET-4 and CET-6.

The handouts in this class are all self-made by Mr.Wang based on the latest topics from IELTS speaking test bank.

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2.2. Procedure

Speaking class was only 28 hours in total. With permission from the speaking teacher Mr. Wang and all the students in the class, a digital camera was placed in the corner of the classroom. The researcher was not a participant in class during the data collection period. Some notes were taken from the showing slides but not from the conversation among students and the teacher.

One digital camera was used over the course of data collection, a Fuji XT-30 without an external mic. A tripod was utilized to stabilize and elevate the camera. However, because it was the first time for students to be exposed in front of the camera during the whole training course, they may have been influenced by the camera.



Figure 1: Group discussion

Videos were transcribed after the completion of the fourth speaking class (July 30th, 2020), which provided us a general view of the class activities. The teacher played four advertisements, therefore discussions, presentations, and reflections were arranged in between each of the advertisements. Then the teacher summarized the key points such as a basic structure of how to answer questions this topic, some useful words and phrases, and some difficulties examinees might find hard to deal with.

2.3. Data analysis

Rough transcriptions were made from a three-and-a-half-hour video of the fourth class, which was on July 30th, 2020.

After an initial data observation, nominating group presentation of the discussion result and the remarks from the teacher were singled out for fine-grained transcription. The reason for such a selection was due to the noisy environment where students carrying out group discussions. In addition, the lack of an external microphone hindered the researcher from catching voices clearly in one specific group. Therefore, only a few interactions among students themselves were transcribed in detail, while the majority of interactions were held between the teacher and students.

3. Data discussion

The research questions of IELTS speaking class are regarding two aspects:

a) What is the pattern of turn-taking in the IELTS training class?
b) What strategies do students and teachers take to repair themselves?

The following part explores the details of interaction in class and showcases the analysis and findings on turns and repairs based on examples collected from transcriptions.

3.1. Repair

Repair is one of the most critical components in the domain of language teaching and learning, first defined by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) [2], which is a set of practices where one of the co-participants interrupts the ongoing course of speech so as to mend the possible trouble in

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speaking, hearing or understanding of the talk. It is unavoidable for L2 learners to make mistakes in their process of study, therefore the corrective feedback from instructors matters since it gives the students a prompt to self-correct their errors and uptake new linguistics features. The distinguished repair strategies vary from *explicit correction* to *recast, expand,* and *extend*. The data shows *the explicit correction* is also rare to find in institutional conversations.

Two types of repair can be identified from the data based on the agent: one is self-repair by the student and the other is repair initiated by the teacher. The latter one can be further categorized into three types, namely *recast*, *expand* and *extend*. As a result, recast is the most popular strategy that both instructors and students would like to apply to facilitate them to initiate and respond to a repair. Detail discussions on repair strategies are as follow.

3.1.1. Repairs initiated by the teacher

Among three types of repair, the primary repair strategies the teacher employs is *recast*, occurring 13 times in total. *Expansion* and *extension* take up a much smaller share of the whole, and the rest 5% is given to *explicit correction*, with one occurrence only. The following examples provide a profound insight of recast, expansion, and extension given by the instructor.

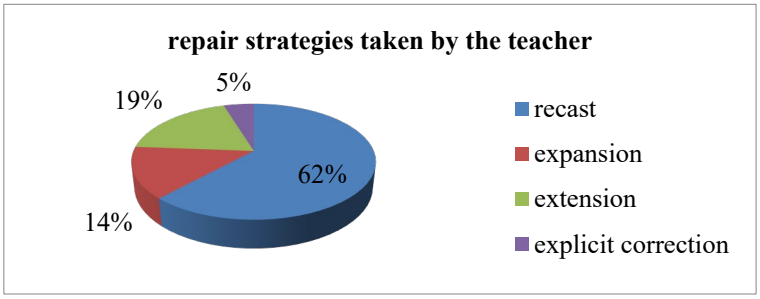

Figure 2: Repair strategies taken by the teacher

3.1.2. Recast

Recast is one of the strategies that the teacher employ to correct students' mistakes, usually in an implicit way. Compared with other repair strategies, *recast* receives the most attention due to its high frequency occurs in L2 learners' communication in EFL classrooms (Ellis & Sheen, 2006) [22].

Recast varies in different forms, such as sometimes a repetition preceding the *recast* or a *recast* needing several turns to be completed, therefore it is wrong to consider *recast* constitute a homogeneous construct (Ellis & Sheen, 2006) [22], but we can assure its facilitate function to language acquisition because it provides students a hint to be aware and then uptake though sometimes such correction may be not so obvious and be misunderstood by students. However, older students, especially undergraduates (age above 18-year-old) can easily catch the signal of implicit correction from the finding of excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1:

19 Teacher: You've seen it in your magazine right. Okay. But it is only one page. It's unlike we see the brochure. The brochure contains many pages. So this we generally call it a printing advertisement. 就是我们说的这种印刷性的广告。那我们刚刚同学们说到的关于这个网站里面这种跳出来的广告叫做中文当中我们把它叫做弹窗

(Translation: "This is what we called the printing advertisement. Just now you mentioned a type of advertisement that pops out from a website in Chinese we call it tan chuang.")

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20 Student: 弹窗
(Translation: “Tan chuang.”)
21 Teacher: 非常好，那么怎么说呢
(Translation: “Very good, so how should we call this?”)
22 Student: breakout
23 Teacher: Break?
24 Student: breakout
25 Teacher: Breakout? （笑）Breakout 是爆发的意思。但是你可以猜出它是一个名词哈这是第一点。爆发就是感觉是一个东西怎么样，
(Translation: “Breakout? （laugh）Breakout means breakout, but you can guess from that firstly, it must be a noun. How do you feel if we say something is breaking out?”)
26 Student: 蹦出来
Translation: “pop up.”
27 Teacher: 蹦出来，非常好，蹦出来，所以我们就会用的是pop。叫Pop-up advertisement. Pop-up. 啊就是弹出来跳出来的意思。
(Translation: “pop up, yes very good. Pop up. So we will use pop here. This advertisement is called a pop-up advertisement. Pop-up means jump out, pop out. ”)

In line 21 of excerpt 1, teacher uses an interrogative sentence to initiate an answer. A student answers “breakout” in line 22. In line 24 the student repeat again with a louder voice and the teacher in line 25 repeats his answer in a tone of asking rhetorical questions which indicates the answer is wrong, followed which is an explanation to the meaning of the word “breakout” ,a clarification of part of speech and a description of a scene of explosions. The waiting time indicates the instructor’s expectation of student’s self-correction and wants to assist as less as possible until the problem cannot be solved by students as the student has already realized his mistake and is trying to come up with his own answer actively though it is not right or not in the form of the target language. Still, the student answers in Chinese without coming up with its corresponding English word in line 26. In line 27 the teacher, at last, gives the right answer. The preceding utterance of the teacher which is in Chinese can be the reason for the student’s answer in Chinese.

Excerpt 2:
130 Teacher: actor actresses yeah. Ok. that’s all?
131 Student:时长
(Translation: “shi chang”)
132 Teacher: The length of the movie. Great. Yeah. The count of length. Yeah. That’s all?
133 Student: Yes

This is a dialogue selected from the teacher and a group presenter. In line 131, the student hesitates a bit and responds in Chinese “shi chang”. The teacher confirms this answer by translating it into English, which is a special form of recast that occurs in Chinese-English classes. Students are encouraged to speak as much as English as possible in this speaking class but it is also acceptable to use Chinese when they are lack of vocabulary. Therefore, students are not intimidated to do so because their instructor uses a large proportion of Chinese as well. It is common to see such code-switching when interlocutors share the equivalent mastery of the same language and in this class, the teacher always uses recast to translate students’ words. Such translation can be referred as a form of recast because the teacher conveys the corresponding meaning in the target language and translation as recast has a high frequency of occurrence in this preparation class.

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Excerpt 3:

186 Teacher: And according to the posters, it must come from?
187 Student: Korea.
188 Teacher: To be more specific which Korea?
189 Student: South Korea.
190 Teacher: Yeah. South Korea. 对韩国一定要说明白是 South Korea.
(Translation: "We have to stress its geographical feature when it comes to Korea.")

The teacher shows a poster of a film called parasite which won the Oscar awards in 2020 to students as an example, asking them about its nation in line 186. Students answered Korea in line 187. In line 188, the teacher uses an interrogative sentence to push them to alter their answer so as to achieve a self-repair. Students then answer "South Korea" in 189. In line 190 the teacher confirms with a signal yeah and addresses the significance of making clear statements on the geographical factor of Korea.

3.1.3. Expansion

Kevin Stuckey (2009) [26] differentiates expansion from extension by pointing out that whether there is any new information adding. In other words, expansion means an instructor uses sound grammar to transfer a word, a phrase, or a choppy sentence from students into a complete one instead of adding extraneous information. It is a beneficial way to increase the input of students and potentially boost their capability of listening and speaking. Teachers use expansion to set a language model for students by utilizing the original words they just mentioned in context and incorporating them with other words into a longer phrase with richer vocabulary or a complete and even more complex multi-clause sentence. Excerpt 2 shows an example of expanding the original phrase made by a student into a longer phrase.

Excerpt 4:

98 Student: to prevent people from drugs
99 Teacher: yeah. To prevent people from taking drugs. 或者我们也不是预防是阻止啊是想要去警醒人们警告人们不要去做这个事情。
(Translation: "Or we can change prevent, impede into the word warn. To warn people not to do this thing.")
100 Student: to warn…
101 Teacher: yes to warn audiences to get away from drugs or stay away from drugs right.

After watching a video clip of advertisement, the teacher asks students to summarize the plots in one sentence or a verbal phrase. By adding a verb "taking", the teacher repaired student's answer in a way of expansion in line 99.

3.1.4. Extension

Extension is adding more information on account of children's attempts or their own words and it is one of the factors to create a "thick" conversation (https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/talk-read-sing/preschool-en.pdf). According to Stuckey (2009) [26], an adult iterates or paraphrases the kids' words and then adds new ideas, which is the meaning of extension. By providing a language that is more complex than what students said, the instructor can assist the students to improve their ability of information processing and gain new vocabulary and grammar. Also, in this

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way, the teacher avoids explicit correction and shows student the differences between his expression and the student's original expression.

Excerpt 5:
101 Teacher: For the purpose do you remember the first one is to
102 Student: Sell the Benz
103 Teacher: Yeah. Sell Benz to attract consumers to buy Mercedes.

Finishing watching three videos of different advertisements released in different countries, the teacher is trying to activate students to recall and summarize key words of sentences and phrases in their previous three discussions, each after the end of playing one advertisement. In line 103, the teacher extends the student's answer by adding more information on the purpose, "to attract consumers to buy Mercedes".

Recast exerts more positive influence on the stress patterns of Iranian EFL learners than the *explicit corrective feedback* (Karimi & Esfandiari, 2016) [29]. Similarly, in this IELTS speaking class conducted in China, recast is a good way to maintain the self-esteem of students compared with explicit pointing out the error and also time-saving because expansion and extension are more likely to lead to other topics and add new information. In contrast, recast focuses on the central meaning of the speakers.

3.1.5. Self-Repair by Students

The strategy of repair initiated by students themselves is repetition, which shares the same common grounds as recast. Both of them are carried out in an implicit way and do not interrupt the flow of communication.

Excerpt 6:
207 Teacher:可以哈 Now pass on.
Translation: "OK. Now pass on."
208 Student: I'm going to talk about a public service ad. Um whose purpose is to warn the audience to get away from drugs, and it is played, it was played, it was broadcast in China.
209 Teacher: En.

The teacher wants students to practice introducing basic information of a film/advertisement in groups and, after the discussion, each group should have a presenter on behalf of the group to summarize the second and the third advertisements. Line 207 is the teacher just finishing commenting on the prior group and he nominates another group to continue. In line 208, the student pays too much attention to the verb "play" and "broadcast" since the teacher stressed them both as alternative key verbs. A self-repair occurs at first in tense, "is" altering to "was"; a second appears at verb, "played" into "broadcast".

Excerpt 7:
228 Teacher: OK. So make sure you pronounce it right. OK. So that's basically about it. But you always your pronunciation is very great. OK. Next one.
229 Student: Um. I'm going to talk about a public service adver..advertisement, and which is pro… which is producted by the China gavernment government and um it's possible it's propose (purpose) is to warn audience to get away from drugs
230 Teacher: En.

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→231 Student: and the ad… The it was broadcast in China in nine in two thousand and seventeen.

In line 229 of excerpt 9, the first self-repair occurs due to a slip of tongue, so the student corrects himself pronouncing from /gævərnmənt / to /gʌvərnmənt/ immediately, showing his perception to this pronunciation error. The second self-repair is in line 231, he changes the subject, "ad" into "it" and repeat the article. Such correction is an attempt to avoid repeating the complicated word and making himself more at ease, but he forgets to eliminate "the" before saying "it" and does not stop the flow to repair again. Both repairs in excerpt 9 do not say the error out in an explicit way, instead change into the right one without interrupting the flow of communication.

3.2. Turn-taking and Sequence Organization

Turn-taking is the fundamental unit of conversation, according to Wong and Waring (2010) [5], who propose a model of interactional practices where two or more turns connected to form sequences then can be brought together to form the overall structuring practices. In institutional conversation, the IRF cycle is not unusual to find, which is the pattern of "teacher initiation, learner response, teacher follow-up" proposed by Nunan (1987) [20].

There are many criticisms towards such an IRF cycle. Some opponents contend this cycle is not a real communication because it is too structural and rigid. In the findings of Seedhouse (1996) [21] IRF cycle and display questions should be promoted instead of banishing given "the prominence of it in parent-child conversation" since both of them are well suited to achieve the core goal of teaching and learning, which means it can be beneficial to provide a framework of a meaningful conversation if it is well-guided. The following examples discover the efficiency of the IRF cycle applied in the IELTS speaking preparation class and the merits this cycle brings to activate the class atmosphere. Both are good evidence to prove Seedhouse' opinion.

This part illustrates the basic pattern of turn-taking and sequence organization in the IELTS training class by observing the data transcribed from the class videos.

Excerpt 8:

Table 1: An illustration of IRF cycle

Classification	Forms	Examples
Initiate	Question	130 Teacher: actor actresses yeah. Ok. that's all?
Response	Statement	131 Student:时长 Translation: "shi chang"
Follow-up	Explanation and another question	132 Teacher: The length of the movie. Great. Yeah. The count of length. Yeah. That's all?
Response of the Follow-up	Statement	133 Student: Yes

Acommon pattern in this speaking training class is starting from a question of teacher and ending with an answer of students, which can be enlarged or varied by students' clarification requests and teacher's intervention. In line 130, the teacher confirms this presenter's answer by repeating what he just says and asks "that's all", an indicator to encourage the student to speak more or to confirm whether he completes his speech. In line 131, the student hesitates a bit and responds in Chinese "shi chang". The teacher confirms this answer by translating it into English and says great then following another "that's all?" in line 132. The student then says yes in line 133. Here "that's all"

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has two functions: one serves as a signal to check whether the interlocutor finishes or not; the other is an implication of encouragement, prodding the speaker to continue his or her utterance which may be relatively short to the questioner.

In this speaking class, the dominance of the turn allocator is the teacher. The pattern follows as:

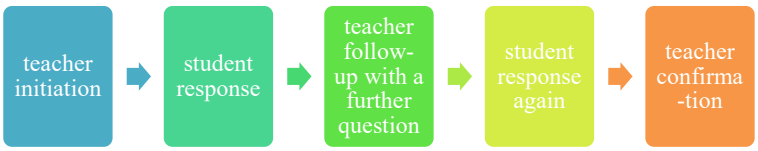

Figure 3 The major pattern of turn-taking

This cycle works efficaciously to encourage students to express their ideas though they are in a passive position because this cycle provides at least several turns targeted to students and forces them, to some degree, to speak up. Otherwise, the whole class will be lack of interactions because students tend to remain silent and listen to the instructor while taking notes diligently. Thus it will result in a failure of the teaching goal of a speaking class. The atmosphere of the class will be tense if the teacher always nominates a particular student to answer, but it will be more acceptable for them to take turns to answer on the behalf of their groups after a fruitful discussion within the groups.

During the whole process of this speaking class, such mode is rarely interrupted. Students rarely start a turn though they are allowed to do so.

One major reason that contributes to this phenomenon is the format of the IELTS speaking test, which is always held as questions initiated firstly by the examiner and the test-taker answers. The examinee has little chance to ask back just as having a real conversation in our daily life. For example, if you just finish answering the question: what's your hobby? You should wait until another question releases instead of asking the examiner: how about you? Questions are only allowed on making inquiries as repeating or explaining the question again due to rare failures of hearing the question or understanding the meaning of certain words.

Another reason is that teacher holds a complete superiority in the class, controlling "the floor" throughout the overall conversation process: proposing topics, asking questions, nominating respondents, and accepting, extending, or rejecting what is said (Jaeger, 2019) [23]. Such a feature restricts the generative interactions because not only the number of students' turns is less than teachers, but also the gap in the length of utterance between the teacher and students is large. The two pie charts below illustrate the imparity of turns allocated by teacher and student from two perspectives, number, and length. Teacher's turns are longer, larger in number, which is in line with previous literature. The major component of the teacher's turns is complete sentences, namely statements, explanations, comments, and interrogative sentences. In contrast, words, phrases, or choppy sentences dominate the content of students' turns.

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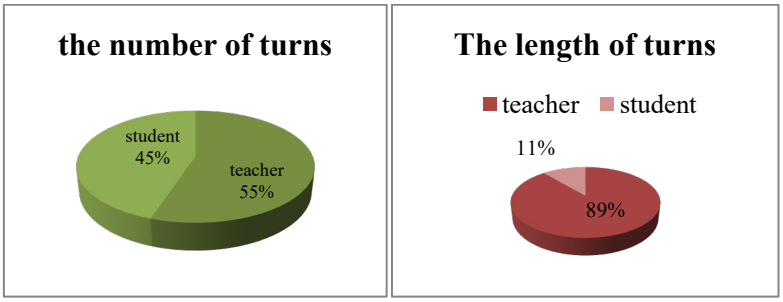

Figure 4 Number and length of turns allocated by the teacher and students

The uneven distribution of words can play effectively in fulfilling teaching tasks in a limited time, which is a characteristic of a cramming method.

The turn-taking is more rigid compared with other EFL classes. In this IELTS class, given the limited time and heavy workload, the teacher has to determine and weigh the proportion of his own and students' turn. Less discussion time is permitted and the appointed presentation is the most common and effective way to comment and correct students' performance.

4. Conclusion

By using the methodology of conversation analysis, this research has investigated the repair strategies taken by class participants and the pattern of turn-taking and sequence of IELTS speaking class. Findings are as follows. First, the teacher has a partiality for recast to repair students' errors, rather than other methods, namely expansion and extension and all of them pertain to implicit correction. As for students, they achieve self-repair by using repetition mostly in their answers. Second, the IRF cycle is found across all the interactions in class. The comparison of number and length of turns between the teacher and students is made to analyze the characteristics of the preparation class of the IELTS speaking test. It is not identical to any other EFL class due to the difference in duration of the class, distribution of turns, and teaching aims.

The findings of this research provide a fresh view of a result-oriented English class with a focus on managing test only, which also approves the legitimacy of the IRF cycle that contributes to teaching efficiency and a harmonious class atmosphere. Implicit corrections should be promoted in the future teaching process especially for the older students who can distinguish minor differences from model language and uptake newly learning linguistic skills.

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