Types and Characteristics of Classroom Exchanges in Korean Middle School TETE Classes: A Discourse Analysis and Its Pedagogical Implication*

Sun Hee Kim**

Hankyong National University

Abstract

This paper describes discourse functions of classroom exchanges in TETE classes. The empirical data comes from a one-year long observation of seventh grade English classrooms. The study observed that there were very few instances of real communication and that the interaction patterns observed in the classes are different from those in natural communication in English. The paper shows that what is needed in the TETE classes is not only the teacher's use of English but the students' active participation in meaningful interaction and negotiation. The paper concludes that a prerequisite for more successful and efficient TETE classes is sincere and systemic effort to help and lead students to actively participate in classroom interaction.

Key words: Teaching English through English, teaching and learning practices in EFL classes, teacher-learner interaction in EFL setting, meaning negotiation

I. Introduction

In this global age, we are having more and more opportunities

to use English as the lingua franca in international communication settings. Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Education in Korea has taken several educational measures to strengthen the 7th National English Curriculum. One of them is the introduction of teaching English through English (TETE) into elementary and secondary school English classes. The rationale behind this introduction has been that teachers' use of English as the medium of instruction is certain to afford students more opportunities to interact through English (Ellis, 1984; Littlewood, 1981).

Prerequisite for successful implementation of TETE, especially in foreign language instruction setting, as has been widely known, is that there has to be sufficient opportunities for students to interact in English with their teachers and peers. The question at hand is whether the students are offered ample chances to interact in English in their TETE classes.

Although there has been a lot of research done on TETE in formal school setting in Korea, it is lacking in understanding of the realities of the classroom: what is really going on in TETE classes. The present study investigates utterance types of TETE discourses in Korean middle school classes through a one-year observation of seventh grade TETE classes in Korea. The study reveals that the TETE classes lack in meaningful communicative interactions between the teacher and students, and suggests that systemic and massive effort needs to be put forth for effective implementation of TETE in Korean middle school classes.

II. Background

Since the pioneering work of Krashen (1981), it has been widely accepted that one of the most important factors in successful second language acquisition (SLA) is input of the target language (TL) (Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 1984; Krashen, 1982). According to Krashen's input hypothesis, the success of SLA hinges on the nature and amount of comprehensible input provided to the learners.

However it has later been discovered that comprehensible input is not a sufficient, but a necessary condition for successful SLA (Bragger, 1985; Swain, 1985). Swain claims that mere exposure to comprehensible input does not guarantee successful SLA. What is essential for L2 learners to become competent TL speakers is comprehensible output, that is, the opportunities and chances for learners to produce their own speech.

In an attempt to connect input and output in SLA, it has been suggested that meaning negotiation between interlocutors can facilitate acquisition (Long, 1983, 1996). According to Long's interaction hypothesis, while native speakers' or more competent interlocutors' interactional modifications for meaning negotiation make complex linguistic input more comprehensible, input modifications alone are hardly sufficient. The increased comprehensibility helps find out the meaning of new forms and makes them acquirable and finally facilitates learners' production process.

This change of focus from input to output has led many EFL practitioners to believe in the importance of communicative interaction in SLA (Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1991). Rationalized in this flow of change has been the introduction of TETE in the 7th National English Curriculum in Korea. Ever since the introduction of this new policy in 2001, meaningful and radical changes have been made in various areas of English teaching and learning in Korea.

Recently many interesting studies had been made to explore the applicability and effectiveness of TETE in Korean classroom settings (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2006; Lee, Choi, Boo, & Lee, 2001; Lim, 2002; Moon & Lee, 2002; Park 1996; Park and Park, 2002; Park, Park, Choi, & Lee, 2001; S. A. Kim, 2002; S. Y. Kim, 2002; Y. S. Kim, 2002). Some studies explored perception and attitude of students and teachers about the classroom practices of TETE as well as the policy itself (Kim, 2001; Kim, 2006; Lee, Choi, Boo, & Lee, 2001; Moon & Lee, 2002; Park, Park, Choi, & Lee, 2001; S. A. Kim, 2002; S. Y. Kim, 2002; Y. S. Kim, 2002). They show that teachers and students were generally negative to the full implementation of TETE in Korean English classrooms,

even though both groups recognize that TETE can help students to improve their communicative skills.

Other studies focused on the role and importance of English as the medium of instruction in TETE classes. (Park 1996; Park and Park, 2002). They explored, in particular, which one, among the English only TETE class, the (Korean and English) bilingual class, and the Korean only class, is more effective for developing students' communicative competence. They found that the most effective was the class with a dominant use of English and a judicious use of Korean.

III. The study

1. Research questions

There are two intriguing features shared by the previous studies on various issues on TETE in Korea. One is that most of them are based upon questionnaire surveys (Kim, 2001; S. Y. Kim, 2002; Y. S. Kim, 2002, etc.). The other is that many of them employed short-term classroom observations or one-time observations (Lee, 2006; Lim, 2002; S. A. Kim, 2002). Thus, there seems to be a pressing need for long-term classroom observation research, which is certain to provide us with a more comprehensive view of efficiency and practicability of TETE in English classrooms in Korea.

With this circumstantial and pedagogical background in mind, the present study focuses on the following research questions:

1) What are major communicative functions of discourse exchanges observed in Korean TETE classes?
2) To what extent are TETE classes in Korea communication oriented?

2. Participants and Setting

The main observational base of this study was seventh grade English classes in Seoul. The classes were taught by a teacher

with eight years of experience in English teaching at public middle schools. The participating teacher majored in English education at college, and had the master's degree in English language education.

The school where the classroom observation was made is located in the western part of Seoul. The school had thirteen classes for the seventh grade, with no more than 40 students in each class. The participating teacher taught four classes of the seventh grade three times a week.

The original research was intended to observe discourse exchanges in one class over a year. This, however, was not possible, because of a new school policy about class division and organization: the students were divided into three different proficiency groups, depending on their scores on the midterm and final exam. Hence, the present study had four different classes to observe: the low-level class, the average-level class, the high-level class, and the regular class.

3. Data collection and Analysis

The four types of TETE classes were videotaped by the researcher as the non-participant observer. The observation was made once a week and twenty six times in total. Each observation session lasted approximately forty minutes. The observation schedule for each class is as follows.

The regular class was observed six times from the beginning of the first semester to early May. After the midterm exam of the first semester, the students were divided into three level classes, according to their performance on the midterm exam. From early May to the end of the first semester, the low-level class was observed six times, and from the beginning of the second semester to late October, the high-level class was observed seven times. Lastly, from the midterm of the second semester to the end of the school year, the average-level class was observed seven times.

The four types of TETE classes were videotaped using a personal camcorder, and a field note was made about detailed features of the classes. Sometimes interviews with the teacher

and students were conducted, when necessary.

All the observation data was fully transcribed into written forms for analysis. The transcribed data was analyzed with the 'act', the minimal discourse unit of Boulima's (1999) 'Foreign Language Interaction System (FLIAS)', which is an adapted version of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) system by Boulima (1999) (see Appendix 2).

IV. Results and Discussion

1. Regular class

To address the first research question, the communicative functions of the classroom discourse utterances are categorized into 27 act types of Boulima's (1999). In the regular class, almost all types of acts were observed. The frequency distribution of the act types observed in the regular class is shown in Figure 1[1].

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of act types in the discourse of the regular class

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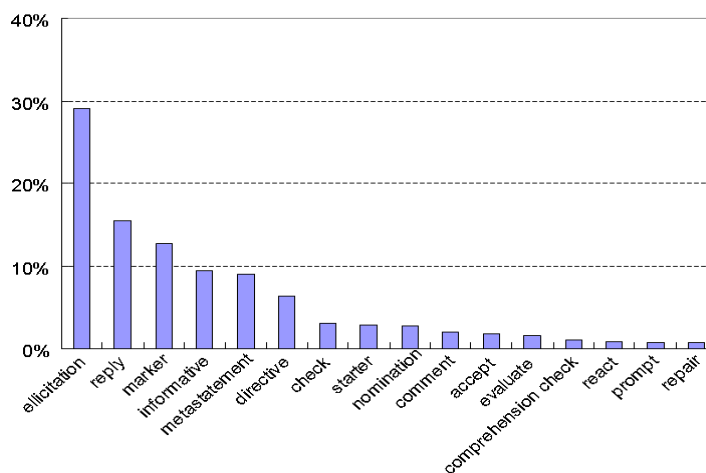
[1]The act types less than 1% were omitted from all the figures in the paper.

The most frequent act type observed in the regular class was elicitation, which accounts for 29% of the whole acts. The second and the third most frequent acts were reply and marker, the rates of which were 15% and 13%, respectively.

The following excerpt from Lesson Three illustrates the main characteristic features of the exchange patterns observed in the regular class.

(1)[2]
1　T: On Sundays랑 같은 표현이 뭐에요? (elicitation)
　　　What is the same expression as 'On Sunday'?
2　S: Every Sunday. (reply)
3　T: Every Sunday죠. (accept)
　　 It's every Sunday.
　　 On Mondays. (elicitation)
4　SS: Every Monday. (reply)
5　T: On Tuesdays. (elicitation)
6　SS: Every Tuesday. (reply)
7　T: Every Wednesday (elicitation)
8　SS: On Wednesday. (reply)
9　T: 그냥 On Wednesday? (repair initiation.)
　　　On Wednesday. That's it?
10 SS: 아니, S. (reply)
　　　No, it needs S.
(regular class; Lesson Three[3])

The discourse exchange from 3T through 8SS consists of three elicitations and three replies. This once again shows that elicitation is the most common act.

Three subtypes in elicitation were observed; elicitation for real communication, elicitation for display questions, and elicitation for pattern drills. The frequency distribution of the three types of elicitations in TETE discourse of the regular class is as in Figure 2.

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[2] See Appendix 1 for transcript notations.
[3] Lesson Three refers to the third out of all six lessons observed in regular class.

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of elicitation types in discourse exchanges of the regular class
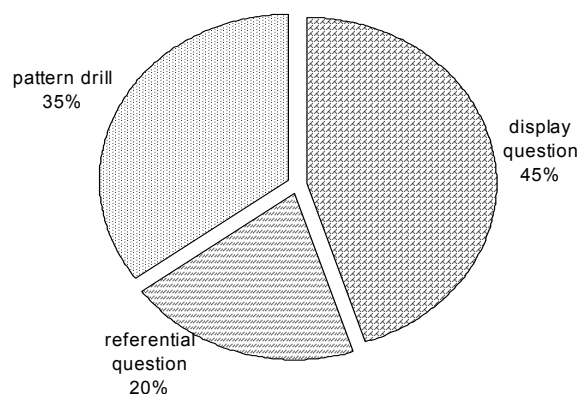

Figure 2 shows that most of the elicitations observed in the regular class are display questions and pattern drills, which account for 80% of all the occurrences.

Elicitation for real communication, which is canonically realized in the pattern of 'the referential question and answer' between the teacher and students, is not easy to observe in the regular class. The paucity of elicitation for real communication, as will be discussed in the following sections, is also observed in the other three types of TETE classes.

The following illustrates referential questions in the regular class.

(2)
1 T: My favorite color is (elicitation)
   내가 가장 좋아하는 색깔은// (raising her hand)
   My favorite color is
2 SS: Sky blue
   [Red]
   [Yellow] (reply)
3 T: Sky blue? (elicitation)
4 SS: <Some students raise their hands> (reply)
5 T: Red? (elicitation)
6 SS: <Some students raise their hands> (reply)

7   T: Yellow? (elicitation)
8   SS: <Some students raise their hands> (reply)
(regular class; Lesson One)

One intriguing feature to be noted in the above example is that all the referential questions are realized in one-word sentences and are immediately followed by mechanical responses. What this seems to show is that the discourse exchanges observed in the regular class do not involve any meaningful negotiation between the teacher and students. Nor do the exchanges observed in this class involve any substantial form of interaction. All in all, the exchange patterns in the regular class show that the students do not participate actively in the classroom interaction.

2. High-level class

As was the case in the regular class, almost all the act types of Boulima (1999) are found in the high-level class. The frequency distribution of the act types observed in the high-level class is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Frequency distribution of act types in the discourse of the high-level class
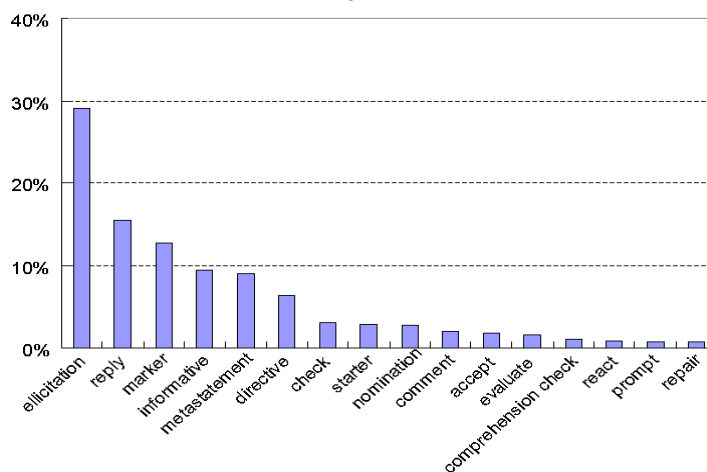
As in the regular class, the most frequent act type observed in the high-level class was elicitation, which accounts for 24% of

the whole acts. The second and the third most frequent acts were marker and reply, the rates of which were 16% and 14%, respectively.

The following excerpt from Lesson Two illustrates the main characteristic features of the discourse patterns observed in the high-level class.

(3)
1 T: O.K. (marker) What is the answer to B? (elicitation)
2 SS: 4, 3, 2, 1 (reply)
3 T: O.K. (marker) Say numbers. (directive)
4 SS: 4, 2, 1, 3, 5 (reply)
5 T: [4, 2, 1, 3, 5] O.K. (marker) My answers are all correct. <raising her hand>? (check)
6 SS: <Some students raise their hands >
7 T: O.K. You did a good job. (evaluation)
     (high-level class; Lesson Two)

As in the regular class, there were three subtypes of elicitation; referential questions, display questions, and pattern drills. Frequency distribution of the three types of elicitations observed in the high-level class is as in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of elicitation types in discourse exchanges of the high-level class
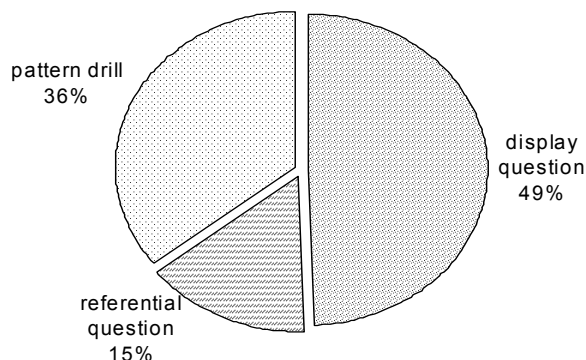
The same pattern as has been observed in Figure 2 is found in Figure 4. Most of the elicitations observed in the high-level class are display questions and pattern drills, which account for 85% out of all the occurrences. Referential questions, which serve to elicit students' active participation in the classroom discourse, are not easy to observe even in the high-level class.

The following examples, from Lesson Three and Six of the high-level class, respectively, show that the classroom discourse in this class is not rich in real communication or negotiation.

(4)
1 T: One twenty three (directive) / One twenty three(directive) // Who's absent today? (elicitation) Uh? (prompt) // Who's absent? (elicitation) //Uh? (prompt) Who's absent? (elicitation)//
2 SS: <no response>
3 T: Who's absent? (elicitation)
4 SS: <no response>
5 T: // E-mail을 활용하여 영어 편지를 써 본 적이 있습니까?
   Have you ever written letters in English by e-mail? (informative)
(high-level class; Lesson Three)

(5)
1 T: Do you wanna listen again or Do you wanna check your answers? (elicitation)
2 SS: Listen again. (reply)
3 T: Listen again. (accept) O.K. (marker).
(high-level class; Lesson Six)

In (4), the teacher used referential questions (1T and 3T) to elicit students' response but nobody answered. The exchange came to an end, without meaningful negotiation.

No meaningful negotiation was made in (5), either. The teacher's intention of the elicitation (1T) and (2SS) in (5) is not to initiate negotiation. The teacher provided pre-meditated alternatives and there were no meaningful choices for the students to choose from. In sum, the discourse exchanges

observed in the high-level class are not communication oriented.

3. Average-level class

In contrast to the exchange patterns in the regular and the high-level class, there was not a rich variety of act types in the average-level class. The frequency distribution of the act types observed in the average-level class is shown in Figure 5.

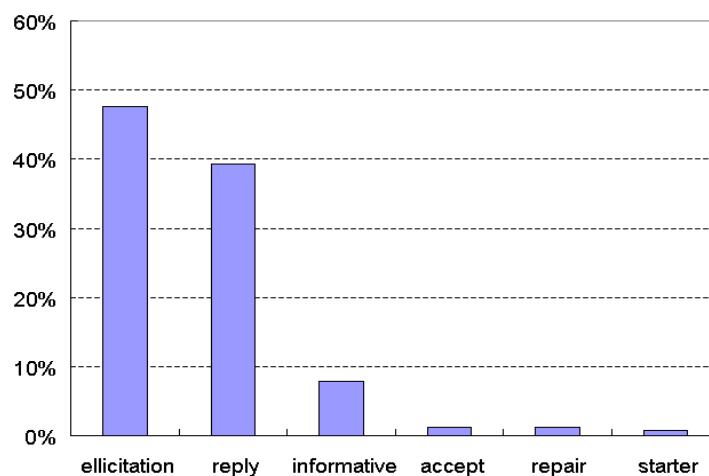Figure 5. Frequency distribution of act types in the discourse of the average-level class

Figure 5 demonstrates that elicitation, reply, and informative act account for almost all the discourse exchanges. One most prominent feature of the exchanges in the average-class is that most of the utterances are not full sentences but one- or two--word sentences. What this seems to suggest is that the exchanges in the average-class was not intended for meaningful communication but mechanical pattern drill.

Now note that, in the elicitations in the average-level class, pattern drills and display questions, but not referential questions, were observed. Frequency distribution of the two types of elicitations in the average-level class is presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Frequency distribution of elicitation types in discourse exchanges
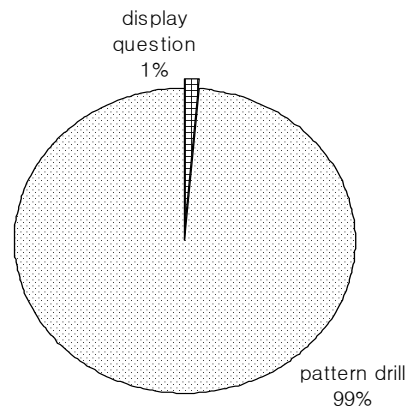of the average-level class

Figure 6 shows there is no referential questions in the discourse exchanges in the average-level class. Furthermore, most of the exchanges observed in this class were pattern drills. What this seems to show us is there were few chances, if any, for the students to have participated in real communication and negotiation.

The following example, from Lesson Six in the average--level class, shows some details of elicitations.

(6)
1 T: 따라 읽으세요. spare (elicitation)
     Repeat, please.
2 SS: spare (reply)
3 T: spare (elicitation)
4 SS: spare (reply)
5 T: spare (elicitation)
6 SS: spare (reply)
7 T: activity (elicitation)
8 SS: activity (reply)
9 T: activity (elicitation)
10 SS: activity (reply)
(average-level class ; Lesson Six)

The exchanges from (1T) through (10SS) consist of pattern drills, which are, in nature, mechanical.

4. Low-level class

Like the exchange patterns in the average-level class, there were only few types of acts in the low-level class. The frequency distribution of the act types observed in the average-level class is shown in Figure 7.

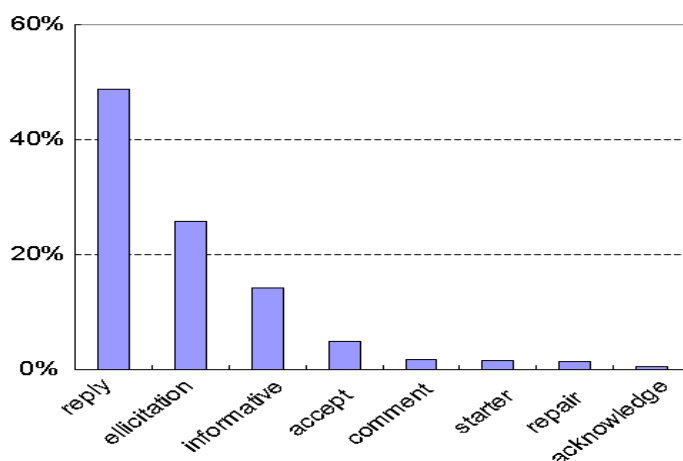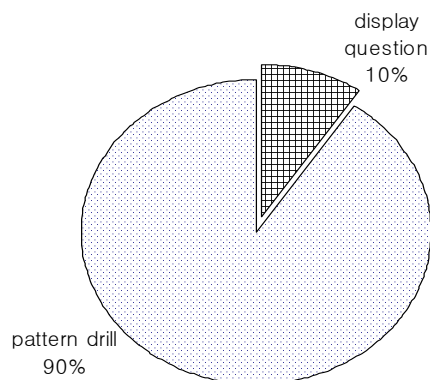Figure 7. Frequency distribution of act types in the discourse of the low-level class

Figure 7 shows the most frequent act type in the discourse exchanges of the low-level class is reply. The second and the third most frequent acts are elicitation and informative, respectively. Reply in this class mainly serves as responses to check, comprehension check, confirmation check, clarification check as well as to elicitation. In addition, even when elicitations were given in Korean, lots of replies are made in English. This caused reply to be the most frequently observed act type in Figure 7.

As in the average-level class, elicitation in discourse exchanges of the low-level class can be divided into two subcategories: pattern drill and display question.

Figure 8. Frequency distribution of elicitation types in discourse exchanges of the low-level class

Note that the frequency distribution of the two types of elicitations in the low-level class is not much different from that in the average-level class. Figure 8 demonstrates that almost all elicitations observed in the low-level class are pattern drills.

Like the elicitations in the other three classes, elicitations in the low-level class were not communication oriented. As in the discourse exchanges of the average-level class, there is not a single instance of referential question which triggers real communication in the exchanges of the low-level class. This characteristic feature is illustrated in the following example.

(7)
1 T: 따라해 보세요. Watch out. (elicitation)
      Repeat, please.
2 SS: Watch out. (reply)
3 T: Watch out. (elicitation)
4 SS: Watch out. (reply)
5 T: The taxi almost hit you. (elicitation)
6 SS: The taxi almost hit you. (reply)
7 T: The taxi almost hit you. (elicitation)
8 SS: The taxi almost hit you. (reply)
(low-level class; Lesson Four)

Note that all the elicitations in (7) lead to pattern drills, but not to meaningful communication or interaction.

In all four types of TETE classes, there were very few cases of real communication. Considering the uniqueness of the context of formal EFL teaching and learning, it is very challenging for both the teacher and students to interchange information for real communication. Display questions can be understood in the same vein. According to Lee (2006), display questions are central resources available for teachers' and students' organizing their lessons and producing language pedagogy. It is possible, however, if and only if there are multiple Initiation-Response-Feedback(IRF) sequences along the same topics in their classroom discourse. Long's interactional modification can be regarded as another name of multiple IRF sequences. It is understood that both of them emphasize that teachers should elicit a response from their students along the talk especially when the student in case has some difficulty in responding.

The problem detected in the TETE classroom discourse is that there were lots of display questions forming multiple IRF sequences even though there were found lots of display questions. In this sense, the interaction patterns observed in TETE classes are different from those observable in natural communication in English even when it is understood that there can be active teachers and thereby passive students in the classrooms.

From the interviews with the teacher, the teacher did not found to understand TETE policy fully and properly. For the teacher, to put it simply, more English goes into better classes. All these suggest that the necessity for teacher to improve their awareness of TETE.

V. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study examined discourse exchanges in four different types of seventh grade TETE classes. The study observed that there were very few instances of real communication, even

though there were various types of discourse acts, especially in the high-level and the regular class.

One prominent feature of discourse exchanges in all four types of TETE classes was that the teacher initiates the interaction and the students passively respond to it. Another is that there were only few teacher questions forming multiple IRF sequences, regardless of display questions or referential questions. This is clearly different from the interaction patterns observed in natural communication and meaningful negotiation.

What this seems to indicate is that the teacher's use of English in TETE classes is not what TETE should be all about. TETE may not help the students to participate in meaningful interaction, and thereby may not assist the learners to improve their communicative skills. Or worse, it may discourage students from participating in classroom communication[4].

To remedy this problematic situation, there is a need to explore how to encourage students to actively participate and speak out in English in TETE classes. This is much more important and urgent than the other popular issues on TETE which include "Which language should be the medium of instruction in English classes?"

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[4]Students were found to more actively participate in the teacher's TETK (teaching English through Korean) class than in her TETE class. Furthermore multiple IRF sequences were not particularly rare in TETK classes.

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Appendix 1. Transcription Conventions

Transcription conventions were used to include as much information as possible into the data.

1. Extracts from the data are transcribed line by line indicating the number of turn in the left margin, followed by the speaker, as illustrated in the following example:

1 T: Where's the book? (elicitation)
2 S1: The book is on the table. (reply)
3 T: Good. (evaluate)

2. An utterance that has a double function is followed by the appropriate acts separated by a diagonal line, as in (eva./ re.)

3. The following symbols are used for discourse transcription (cf. Jefferson 1979; Schiffrin 1987, van Lier 1988; Tannen 1989; Dubois 1991).

T: teacher
S1: identified student (i. e., a student nominated by the teacher)
S: unidentified student
SS: several or all the students simultaneously.
  =: the turn continues below, at the subsequent identical symbol.
  ., .., ⋯, etc.: short pause. Three periods stands for approximately one-second pause.
  [...]: omission of elements unnecessary for current analysis.
He   witnessed: onset and end of the speech overlap. The space in the turn above
  [saw]   does not indicate a pause unless marked by periods.
<unint> : unintelligible item
[wær]: square brackets indicates phonetic transcription
< >: angle brackets indicate information provided by the investigator.
Sh::: : one or more colon indicate lengthening of the preceding sound.

Appendix 2. The 27 Acts in the FLIAS System (see Boulima (1999) for details)

1) Marker: A marker is realized by words such as 'well', 'now' and 'okay'. It functions to relate utterances to one another or to mark a boundary in the discourse.

2) Starter: A starter provides information about or directs the students' attention towards the area that the teacher is going to talk about, thus aiming at facilitating the understanding of the teachers' further contribution.

3) Elicitation: An elicitation requests a linguistic response.

4) Check: A check is realized by real questions where the teacher does not know the answer. Its function is to enable the teacher to check the progress of the lesson.

5) Directive: A directive is realized by a command. Its function is to request a non-linguistic response.

6) Informative: An informative is realized by a statement. Its function is to provide information.

7) Prompt: It is realized by a class of items (for example, 'go on,' come on,' 'hurry up,' 'and-?,' 'or-?,' 'yes-?,' 'you ask about-?,' 'make a sentence-'. etc.) by the teacher's repetition of her previous elicitation, or by the teacher's repetition of all or part of a student's utterance.

8) Clue: A clue is realized by a statement, command, question, or moodless item. Its function is to provide additional information to help the student answer the 'elicitation' or react properly to the 'directive.'

9) Repair: A repair functions to treat problems of speaking and understanding.

10) Repair-initiation: This act functions to elicit a repaired reply.

11) Comprehension Check: The teacher performs a comprehension check to inquire whether the students have understood a previous utterance (see Chaudron 1988: 45).

12) Confirmation Check: The speaker (teacher or student) performs a 'confirmation check' to inquire whether her/his understanding of her/his interlocutor's previous utterance is correct.

13) Clarification Request: The speaker (teacher or student) performs a 'clarification request' to ask for further information from the interlocuter about her/his previous utterance.

14) Challenge: A challenge is a speech act that asserts or implies a state of affairs that, if true, would weaken a person's claim to be competent in filling the role associated with a valued status. In the data, challenge is a students' act.

15) Cue: It is realized by a closed class of items such as 'raise your hands,' 'hands up.' Its function is to provoke a bid, thereby making students abide by the turn-taking pattern operating in classroom interaction.

16) Bid: A bid functions to express the desire to speak.

17) Nomination: A nomination is realized by a closed class or items such as students' names, 'you,' 'yes.' Its function is to give the student permission to speak.

18) Reply: A reply is mainly performed by the student, but it may also be performed by the teacher. Its function is to provide a response to an 'elicitation'.

19) React: A react is performed by the student and realized by a non-linguistic action. Its function is to provide a response to a 'directive.'

20) Comment: A comment is performed by the teacher, usually in the feedback slot, and realized by a statement. It functions to exemplify, justify, and provide additional information.

21) Accept: An accept functions to indicate that the teacher has heard or seen and that the 'reply,' 'informative,' or 'react' was appropriate.

22) Evaluate: An evaluate is realized by words and phrases such as 'Good,' 'That's right,' 'Interesting,' 'Fine,' 'Yes,' and 'No', and also by a repetition of the student's reply.

23) Metastatement: A metastatement is realized by a statement which refers to some future time when what is described will occur.

24) Conclusion: A conclusion is realized by a statement summarizing what has gone before.

25) Aside: An aside is realized by an utterance not really addressed to the class. It covers instances where the teacher is talking to herself.
26) Silent Stress: A silent stress is realized by a pause following a marker. Its function is to highlight the marker when it is serving as the head of a boundary exchange indicating a transaction boundary.
27) Acknowledge: An acknowledge is realized by a verbal or non-verbal signal confirming that the student is listening and understanding.