Triadic Dialogue in EFL Classroom: Embedded Extensions

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Abstract. Students learn languages through talking and there is a documented need for more student talk in the classroom. Through talk we learn not only structural components of a language but also the communicative application of it. Can standard classroom speaking strategies, embodied in typical predictable patterns, successfully serve these functions? And to which extent should those traditional patterns allow predictability and control in managing classroom interaction? In this paper the focus is driven towards the ways the classroom teacher can orchestrate and support a kind of classroom discourse that engenders more active student talk that leads to foreign language learning. A particular emphasis is put on the use of the Triadic Dialogue, known as IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) pattern, the value of which has been debated in writings on language education. It has attracted criticism for being ritualistic and restrictive, although recent research has pointed to the range of functions that may be fulfilled by the follow-up move. The paper examines the constituents and possible sub-genres of the three-part classroom exchange and aims to prove that a certain degree of freedom is possible within the constraints of the Triadic Dialogue. Drawing on recorded episodes of teacher-students interaction in adult EFL classroom, the paper will show that the three-part pattern allows spontaneous variations and extensions initiated both by teachers and students. The variety of forms that the basic IRF structure can take enriches the linguistic repertoire of choices in the co-constructed classroom reality.

Keywords: classroom discourse; discourse analysis (DA); conversation analysis (CA); open and close discourse; Triadic Dialogue or IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) pattern.