The Impact of Teacher Speech Modification on the Quality of Interaction and Learning: An Analysis of Spoken Discourse in Saudi EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate, following a qualitative research design, the ways in which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers modify their speech in an endeavor to create interactive learning environments facilitated by the implementation of strategies providing inherently comprehensible input for students. The study also seeks to examine students' reactions to the use of such different speech modification strategies. The data gathered was taken from three different EFL classrooms with a total of sixty-two university students (forty male and twenty-two female) and three non-native speakers (NNS) of English language teachers. The data analysis reveals that EFL teachers regularly modify their talk through the use of different linguistic and interactional strategies in the Saudi EFL context, including the use of simplified grammar and vocabulary, shorter sentences, repetition, and emphatic stress and reduced speech rate. Other modification strategies include the use of clarification requests, confirmation checks, transition markers and hand gestures in order to facilitate student understanding and learning. The data analysis also suggests that teachers' modification strategies have a positive impact on language learners in accelerating their

comprehension and developing their classroom interaction. The study results provide valuable implications for foreign language classroom pedagogy and teacher training.

Keywords: Classroom discourse, Speech modification, Teacher talk, Second language learning

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, there has been a great deal of interest in the analysis of discourse, both spoken and written. In an attempt to understand and develop classroom pedagogies and teaching practices, a certain amount of interest has been directed towards the analysis of classroom discourse, which focuses on the interactions between the teacher and the students in a classroom context. Walsh (2013) states that Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), were perhaps the earliest contributors to classroom discourse analysis when they gathered a list of twenty-two teacher and student speech acts and classroom verbal behaviors and developed a system to describe teacher-student talk based on a hierarchy of five discourse units; lesson, transaction, exchange, move and act, in which act is the smallest discourse unit and lesson is the largest (Walsh, 2013). More specifically, the current study is guided by the principles of conversation analysis in classroom discourse as it branches out from the main body of discourse analysis. Paltridge (2006), views ordinary conversation as the most basic form of talk where people come together to exchange information, negotiate and maintain social relations. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) state that conversation analysis aims at: "uncovering the tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction" (p.14). Conversation analysis lends itself at a parameter that is uniquely placed between sociology and other major social science disciplines, namely applied linguistics and social psychology. However, according to Have (1999): "Conversation analysis has something special to offer in that it is able to "see structuring" in suprasentential stretches of words in natural speech situations, whereas linguistics is limited to analyzing just the structures of written sentences" (p.198). Conversation analysis explores three particular elements of spoken discourses which this research study is based on. The first are the mechanisms employed by the speaker when deciding to speak during a conversation, such as rules of turn-taking. Second are the various ways in which the utterances of more than one speaker are related such as the adjacency pair, inserted sequence, conversation maxims, etc. and third are the different functions that conversation is used for, for instance, establishing roles, communicating politeness, etc (Mazur, 2004). It is taken as a given that teachers play a significant role in EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms as their language, conversation strategies and instructional techniques are essential in building students' linguistic and interactional competence. Krashen (1985) proposes that comprehensible input is a necessary factor for the acquisition of a second language. Numerous studies have been conducted during the last twenty years exploring speech or input modification and their effect on language learning (see Bosher & Bowels, 2008; Ellis, 1995; Ellis & He, 1999; Ivanova, 2011; Katib & Khodabakhsh, 2010; Negari & Rouhi, 2012; Oh, 2012; Own, 1996; Shirzadi, 2014; Urano, 2000). However, few, if any, studies have examined speech modification strategies and their effect on the quality of learning in the Saudi context. The aim of the current study is to investigate the ways in which EFL teachers, in the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Saudi Arabia, modify their speech in an attempt to provide comprehensible input for their learners during classroom interaction. The study focuses on ELI students studying general English at the Threshold B1 level on the *Common European Framework of References* (CEFR). This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies do EFL teachers use with students at the B1 CEFR level to modify their speech in order to create meaningful interaction through comprehensible input?

2. How do learners at this language level react towards different strategies of teacher speech modification?

In Saudi Arabia, English is being taught as a second language even though there are not enough native speakers within the country's social and educational systems (Hughes & Chesters, 2003). This places the notion of teaching English in Saudi Arabia in somewhat of a dichotomy. The teaching of English as a second language (TESL) differs from the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL). In TESL the classes are taken in an English speaking and English language dominated- country, and   students of different nationalities have no other realistic option other than to use English both inside and outside the classroom to manage most of their social needs. TEFL, however, refers to classes of English occuring in a country where the language is foreign   and is not one of the dominant languages, or the dominant language, in the environs outside of the venues where it is being taught (ELT, 2011). The Saudi Arabian context for the   teaching and learning of English falls into the latter category, and   in the case of Saudi students taking English classes, the opportunities of using the language on a daily basis are almost exclusively limited to the classroom, severely limiting opportunities for extensive oral practice of the language in both its vernacular and formal modes. This limitation however applies only to oral skills, since both, the reading (receptive) and written (productive) skills are abundantly available and accessible to everyone of all ages, and valuable opportunities are readily available for Saudi learners to enhance their EFL proficiency in those two areas as is evident in the study (Mason & Krashen, 1997) that examines Japanese students with low English acheivement, by doing extensive "self- selected reading with only minimal accountability" and "writing brief summaries or comments on what they have read" (Mason & Krashen, 1997, p.91). In the Saudi context, the majority of the universities and tertiary level institutions follow the CEFR-based curriculum, where mastery of English at a certain level needs to be attained by the student as a prerequisite for acceptance in the undergraduate courses at major Saudi universities including King Abdulaziz University (KAU) which is the second largest university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Academic Ranking World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Rankings, has ranked KAU in the first place amongst all Saudi Universities and 151-200 amongst the best universities in the world in the academic year of 2015/2016 (ARWU, 2016). Notwithstanding the aforementioned, there seem to be certain issues facing Saudi EFL learners. Amongst these issues is the general lack of intrinsic motivation or drive to learn the language (Rajab, 2015). Alrabaie (2016) discusses extensively the issue of EFL learning in the Saudi context where he states that: "Saudi EFL students are rarely engaged in autonomous learning because it has not been part of their culture or their educational background. Instead, learners are driven by lectures, heavily dependent on textbooks, disoriented, anxious, demotivated, and lack the capacity to take charge of decision making in all areas of learning" (p.30). As such, some researchers believe that many Saudi EFL learners, and despite the immense educational support from the Saudi government, are still considered low achievers in EFL (Alrahaili, 2013; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Studying Classroom Discourse

Investigating classroom discourse is an essential step towards enhancing the learning experience and developing teacher practices. It can be argued that analyzing teachers' and learners' talk and the way they interact in the classroom can reveal a significant amount of information. Walsh (2011) states that "detailed examinations of classroom discourse reveal how interactants collectively co-construct meanings, how errors arise and are repaired, how turns begin, end and are passed or seized" (p. 25). Moreover, in *Classroom Discourse and Teacher Development*, Walsh (2013) focuses on the importance of understanding classroom interactions as an attempt to improve teaching and learning. He explains different approaches that can be used to take a closer look at the specific language features and interactional techniques to help teachers develop their own practices. Therefore, this study is based on a classroom conversation analysis approach and seeks to provide valuable findings that can be put to use to enhance EFL/ESL classroom teaching and learning practices.

2.2 Modified Input

The impact of modified input on EFL/ESL learning has received a great deal of attention in second language research. A number of researchers and linguists claim that modified or simplified input helps accelerate EFL/ESL learning (e.g. Ellis & He, 1999; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2014; Parviz, Seyed Mohammed & Shaban, 2015; Sharwood Smith, 1993; Urano, 2000; Xiaohui, 2010). Perhaps Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis is the most influential theory supporting the use of simplified speech as one way of providing comprehensible input for learners, which, as he argues, is an important factor in the acquisition of a second language. There are two approaches offered by Krashen through which input can be made comprehensible for language learners which are "using the context by the learner" and "presenting simplified input by the teacher" (Maleki & Pazhakh, 2012, p.129).

Several studies have examined the impact of modified or simplified input on the acquisition and comprehension of a second language. Urano (2000), for example, explores the effect of two types of input modification: simplification and elaboration, on second language comprehension and incidental vocabulary acquisition. Reading comprehension was measured by mean reading times and comprehension questions, and two vocabulary tests were used to examine incidental vocabulary acquisition. The results of Urano's (2000) study suggest that both "lexical simplification and elaboration" helped learners' comprehension "at the sentence level." The results also show that "lexical elaboration" triggered "incidental vocabulary acquisition" while simplification did not (p. v). In a later study, Sarab and Karimi (2008) investigated the effect of simplified, interactionally-modified and unmodified input on reading comprehension. The findings of this study revealed that the EFL student comprehension was highest under the interactionally-modified condition and was lowest under the unmodified condition with linguistically-modified text in between. This study indicates that linguistic modification has a positive impact on learners' comprehension of reading material, and that interactional modification has a stronger impact on facilitating learners' comprehension. In a recent study, Xiaohui (2010) examines the effect of

comprehensible input on English vocabulary recognition. The participants were divided into five groups who received different types of written input: two groups of pre-modified input, having lexically elaborated texts and enhanced texts in which the target items were altered by **boldfacing,** *italicizing*, and <u>underlining</u>; a control/baseline input group; an interactionally modified input group, having the opportunity to interact with the researcher and/or with peers to help in understanding the text; and a modified output group, who were required to compose short sentences and to exchange their production with their partners. The study's findings demonstrate the positive effects of pre-modified input, interactionally modified input and modified output on learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition.

2.3 Speech Modification

Teachers' talk modification is considered one of the characteristics of all classroom discourse (Walsh, 2013). Lynch (1996) states that there are three reasons for teachers' modification of their language when talking to language learners. Firstly, there is a link between comprehension and second language progress; secondly, learner language is strongly influenced by teacher language, and thirdly, learners frequently face problems understanding their teachers. (as cited in Schneider & Barron, 2014). Also, one of the causes stated by Walsh (2011, 2013) for this modification to occur is that learners should understand what is being said by the teacher in order to progress and learn the language. Walsh (2013) points out that "an understanding of the ways in which second language teachers modify their speech to learners is clearly important to gain greater insights into the interactional organization of the second language classroom and help teachers make better use of the strategies open to them" (p. 31). There are various ways through which teachers can modify their talk. Chaudron (1988) observes that language teachers modify four aspects of their talk during lesson delivery. These modifications include the use of simplified vocabulary avoiding idiomatic phrases and the use of simplified grammar. Tardif (1994) identifies five speech modification strategies including teachers' repetition of their own utterances, linguistic modeling, expanding utterances, the use of extensive elicitation and questioning, and providing related contextual information.   (as cited in Walsh, 2006). Ivanova (2011) states that research on teachers' discourse adjustment indicates that teachers make discourse, lexical, syntactic and phonological modifications when addressing non-native speaker learners. Walsh (2011, 2013) explains different strategies used by ESL teachers to modify their talk. He states that teachers modify their linguistic resources by using simplified grammar, simple short utterances, fewer modal verbs, simplified vocabulary with no idiomatic phrases, and simplified pronunciation through clearer and slower articulation of words and sentences. He adds that besides these obvious methods of speech modification, teachers may modify their interactional resources through utilization of additional strategies. Among these strategies are the use of clarification requests, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, paraphrasing, and repetition.

2.4 Previous Studies on Speech Modification and Its Impact on Language Learning

Gass and Varonis (1985) explore different variables influencing native speakers' (NSs) talk and forms of speech modification. They collected data from eighty taped telephone interviews between non-native speakers (NNSs) as interviewers and NSs as interviewees, and

from twenty NS-NS interviews. The study's findings show that NSs modify their speech to support NNSs' ability to understand and be understood. This means that NSs modify their talk in an endeavor to accelerate comprehension when talking with second/foreign language speakers of the language. In another study, Own (1996) examines various methods of teacher speech modification in relation to the proficiency level of students. The results of the comparative analysis of students' spoken discourse support the hypothesis that teachers modify their speech according to their students' linguistic competence. These studies, and others, lend support to the premise that NSs modify their speech for different purposes and suggest further studies on the manner in which such modifications are articulated. One of the studies that examines the connection between speech modification and language acquisition is that by Ellis in 1995. He examined the relationship between modified oral input and the acquisition of word meaning. The participants were divided into two groups: the first group received a pre-modified input where the input was simplified, and the other group received a baseline input with an interactional modification condition where learners had the opportunity to negotiate meaning to render input comprehensible. The study's findings showed that the scores of the subjects who listened to the pre-modified input were considered low. Another study was conducted by Teng (2001) examining the impact of speech modification on EFL listening. There were in total eight versions of the listening passage: four versions on syntactic modification (unmodified / paraphrased / simplified sentences / mixed), in addition to two speech rates (average / slow) for each syntactic version. Students were assigned to one of the eight control groups of the eight listening versions based on "a randomized complete block design" (p. 532). Findings show that "subjects in the paraphrase, simple sentence, and mixed groups got significantly higher test scores" than were attained by those in the unmodified group. (p. 536). Similarly, the findings reveal that "subjects listening to the passages delivered at a slow rate scored higher on the cloze test than did subjects hearing passages at an average rate". (p. 535). In a third study, Katib and Khodabakhsh (2010) investigated the effect of controlling speech rate on listening comprehension. Participants were 80 Iranian students majoring in English. This study shows that modifying speech by slowing the talk rate does not assist language learners to comprehend listening input. A later study was conducted by Maleki and Pazhakh (2012) who attempted to investigate the effect of speech modification on eighty EFL learners' comprehension of words that were 'new' to them. They explore the impact of three forms of modification: pre-modified input, interactionally modified input and modified output. Modified input is explained as the NSs' adjustments of their language to make it comprehensible for non-native learners (Maleki & Pazhakh, 2012). The aforementioned researchers also explained that interactionally modified input is characterized by a joint modification and reconstruction of the interaction by NSs and NNSs to reach "a mutual understanding" (p. 129); and modified output is the second language learners' reformulation of their own utterances. Students were randomly divided into four groups: pre-modified input, interactionally modified input, modified output, and unmodified input and output (the control group). The findings of the statistical analysis showed that the participants in the interactionally modified input group achieved the highest comprehension scores among all four groups. Also, the modified output group performed better than the pre-modified and control groups. However, the study found no significant

difference between the pre-modified and control groups who achieved the lowest comprehension scores. Notwithstanding, while one of the studies shows a significant effect of syntactic modification on learners' listening comprehension, there is a controversy over the positive impact of slowing speech rate. Also, some studies (e.g Ellis, 1995; Maleki and Pazhakh, 2012; Sarab and Karimi, 2008) highlighted the importance of interaction as a source of speech modification. These studies indicated that students who were given the chance to interact as a way of modifying input achieved higher scores than those who merely listened to modified input.

3. Methodology

Qualitative methods were adopted to accomplish this study's objectives. Video and audio recordings were the principal tools employed to investigate teachers' interaction strategies and their impact on students' oral contributions. Qualitative methods were supported by quantitative data which concerned the number of times each type of strategy is employed. This research paper is centered in the interpretivist paradigm and it mainly underpins qualitative tools for data collection and analysis. According to Willis (1995) interpretivists are anti-foundationalists, who believe there is no one particular way or correct method leading to knowledge. Interpretivist researchers attempt to derive their concepts from the field by an in-depth examination of a certain phenomenon or an area of interest. The assumptions underlying social constructivism hold that meanings are socially constructed through interaction with others and through cultural conventions in people's lives (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, in order to make sense of and interpret the participants' behavior, the research must focus on the manner in which interaction takes place among individuals and on the context in which they work (Creswell, 2009). By taking a qualitative approach that utilizes an interpretivist focus, this research serves to enrich understanding of the impact of EFL teachers' interaction strategies on enhancing EFL students' contributions and classroom discourse.

3.1 Participants

The data in this study was taken from three EFL classes of Saudi university students, two classes of males and one class of females. Participants in the current study were three EFL teachers and 40 male and 22 female Saudi students (details of participant teachers' information are presented in Table 1 below). Students were studying general English, following the same curriculum, on two separate campuses at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Male students were taught by male teachers and the female students were taught by a female teacher. The three teachers were non-native speakers of English. Students were KAU Foundation Year students required to successfully complete four levels of English during the year as a prerequisite for entering their Bachelor's Degree programs. The three groups of students were randomly selected from Level 104 English sections (Threshold B1 level on the CEFR). This study focused on the students at this level because the syllabus for this level contains more complex student learning outcomes (SLOs) than at the previous program (lower proficiency) levels, and as such the 104 SLOs require a great deal of classroom interaction. The study took part halfway through a seven-week

module (period of teaching spread over seven weeks). It was expected that Level 104 teachers would be using a variety of modification techniques to facilitate learning through interaction, which is the primary concern of the current study.

Table 1. Participant Teachers' Information

Teacher	Qualification	Teaching Experience
TA	LLB (Hons), ITTT TESOL Certification	4 years teaching ESP (English for Diplomacy and English for Law); 7 years teaching English at university level
TB	Master's in English Language (2003)	5-7 years' EFL at university level; 3-4 years' EFL at secondary level
TC	MA TESOL (2013)	11+ years EFL teaching at adult/university level

3.2 Instruments

The instruments utilized were video cameras, MP3 audio recorders, and observation checklists. (See Appendix A). The observation checklist was standard for all observed classes and listed a number of speech modification techniques which are commonly employed by teachers. The checklist was divided into two main categories: modifying linguistic resources and modifying interactional resources, mainly based on Walsh's explanation of different language teacher speech modification strategies. (See Appendix 'A' for additional details).

3.3 Procedures of Data Collection

As the present study utilizes a qualitative research approach, different qualitative methods were used for data collection and analysis, including classroom video and audio recording.

3.4 Classroom Video and Audio Recording

The classroom discourse data was collected from three different sessions, each of approximately 45 minutes' duration; two sessions for two different groups of males with their teachers and one session for the group of females. Video recording proved to be highly effective for classroom interaction analysis, as it provided information on the paralinguistic and semiotic features that could greatly assist in the understanding of the conversation structure of teacher-student talk. Walsh (2013) states "video recordings are a relatively straight forward means of recording interaction in the classroom and have the added advantage of providing a visual representation of what happened" (p. 93). In the classrooms for males, the camera was utilized providing a clear footage of both the teacher and the students. However, as the University's policy does not permit videotaping of female students due to established and accepted cultural and social norms, the class of females was only audio-recorded. The collected data was transcribed using Walsh's (2013) transcription convention system (as shown in Appendix B).

4. Data Analysis and Results

The overall results of the analyzed video and audio recorded data are presented together with a detailed statistical analysis concerning the number of times each modification strategy was employed by the three teachers. Subsequently, three selected extracts from the collected data were analyzed in detail to present an accurate representation of the actual teachers-students interactions. The audio and video recorded data of the current study shows that EFL teachers modify both their linguistic and interactional resources during classroom interaction. The analysis of teacher interaction strategies, together with the analysis of the number of times each strategy was employed by each teacher, reveals that using simplified grammar and teachers' repetition of learners' responses are the most common techniques used by teachers in the Saudi EFL classrooms. Other speech modification strategies were also frequently used by teachers, including the use of simplified pronunciation by slowing speech rate and stressing certain words, and the use of simplified vocabulary. Moreover, the collected data shows less frequent occurrences of paraphrasing, clarification requests and confirmation checks, use of transition markers and teachers' repetition of their own utterances. The data does, however, demonstrate occasional use of comprehension checks by teachers as speech modification tools. The overall data analysis demonstrates that EFL teachers in the Saudi context are able to utilize a wide range of modifying linguistic resources. This is evident, for example, through the use of simplified grammar and pronunciation, compared to modifying interactional resources through the use of clarification requests and comprehension checks. The analysis of the video and audio recorded data of the present study shows that EFL teachers in the Saudi EFL context make use of a several oral modification strategies while interacting with students in face-to-face classroom discussions, including linguistic and interactional modifications. The researchers' observations and notes indicate that EFL learners react positively toward teachers' speech modification strategies as they seem to understand what is being said with very few communication breakdowns or misunderstanding occurring. The detailed analysis of Saudi EFL classroom interaction shows that teachers' simplified sentences, in terms of grammar and vocabulary, along with simplified pronunciation through stress and slow articulation, reinforced with repetition and paraphrasing are effective modification strategies that support students' comprehension and help develop their contributions. The analysis also illustrates the significance of employing some interactional modifications, such as clarification requests, comprehension and confirmation checks and negotiating meaning, in accelerating learners' comprehension and in solving communication problems to achieve mutual understanding between teachers and learners. The use of hand gestures and facial expressions is another modification technique used by some teachers in the Saudi context which helps learners grasp ideas and understand messages with relative ease. However, the analysis indicates that 'difficult' words in teachers' questions or input may result in hesitation and silence on the part of learners, despite teachers' efforts to modify their speech by stressing certain words, slowing speech rate and repetition. Hence, simplifying words and using familiar vocabulary, rather than merely focusing on repetition and clearly pronouncing utterances, would appear to be essential steps toward achieving complete learner understanding. The three following extracts, taken from the three recorded classrooms, demonstrate the use of various modification

strategies by the three participant teachers and reveal how these strategies affect learners' comprehension and participation. The following extract was taken from a group of male learners. The teacher (TB) has discussed some favorite meals in different countries with students and has just talked about the ingredients of pizza. The focus of this section was to introduce new vocabulary related to food and meals.

Extract 1:

1. T: So, where do we put these ingredients? Where (.) do we put these ingredients?

2. Do we put them (.) er teacher is putting a sheet of paper in a horizontal

3. position on his hand where do we put them? This is the pizza holding the paper. I'll

4. show you, I'll show you (.) a piece of pizza, now taking a plate of pizza out of a bag Let

5. me show you a piece of pizza. (7) This is (.) real pizza. You will have this after the class

6. eyes to students. So, this is (.) a small piece (.) of (.) pizza holding a small piece of pizza

7. and moving forward closer to the students. So (.) very small, right? eyes to the pizza

8. and back to the students

9. LL: Yes. eyes to the teacher

10. T: I know it's very small, but (.) er ( ) wanted a, wanted a piece, you got to have it (.)

11. er small. It's homemade, home (.) made moving right hand as if making something.

12. What is the meaning of homemade? It's made where? eyes to students

13. LL: At home.

14. T: Excellent. ↑So, where do we put the ingredients of pizza? pointing to the

15. ingredients at the top of pizza E:r ( ) where do we put- a student raises his hand to

16. answer yes, Sohail… eyes to L1

17. L1: Mozzarella. eyes to teacher

18. T: Where (.) Where? <I'm asking about (.) where?> a student raises his hand Sulami.

19. L2: On the top. eyes to the teacher

20. T: So, we call them… >These ingredients, we call them<? pointing to the top of pizza

21. again

22. /ok/ok/ok/

23. L: Toppings.

24. T: Toppings. We call them what? eyes to students

25. LL: Toppings.

26. T: Excellent, excellent.   (17:28)

The extract opens with a transition marker "so" followed by an elicitation question "where do we put these ingredients?" in line 1. T B repeats the question again but he stresses the word "where" in the same line. He is about to give them an option but stops and repeats "where do we put them"? Interestingly, he uses hand gestures, putting a sheet of paper on a flat position on his hand to demonstrate the surface of a pizza, in an attempt to facilitate students' understanding. He follows this action by repeating the same elicitation request "where do we put them?" However, before giving students time to respond, TB provides a real piece of pizza. He moves the focus of the interaction by introducing the word "homemade" stating "it's homemade" in line 11 and stressing the word homemade. He immediately repeats the word "homemade", with a pause between the two syllables to emphasize the importance of the new word and to indicate the meaning of the word which relates to the word "home", by pausing after the first syllable. The aim of this pause is clear since this slow articulation is followed by two questions "what is the meaning of homemade? Where is it made?" So, the use of pausing in articulating "home(.)made" is possibly to assist students in answering the following elicitation request about the meaning of the word. The students immediately respond, "at home" in line 13. In line 14, TB returns to the first question he asked, initially by repeating "where do we put the ingredients of pizza?", and just before he completes repeating the question another time, a student raises his hand indicating willingness to answer. Note how the teacher repeats the word "where" three times in line 18 upon the wrong answer by L1 in line 17 when he says "Mozzarella". He tries to draw students' attention to the fact that he is asking about 'where' by stressing the word and stating, "I'm asking about (.) where", with a short pause just before the word "where". These modification strategies led students to volunteer and answer correctly without hesitation, as we can see from L2's response "on the top" in line 19. TB follows this answer with an incomplete elicitation statement "we call them", and he pauses to wait for an answer. He repeats, but using slower speech rate and he clarifies the pronoun "them" by substituting it with "these ingredients, we call them" in line 20. There are some overlaps in line 22, but one of the students is able to guess the word and says "toppings" in the following line. In line 24, the teacher pronounces the word "toppings" with a stress followed by an elicitation request, "what do we call them," in which the students echo "toppings" to emphasize their ability to articulate the new word. The analysis of extract 1 shows clearly how TB employs different speech modification techniques in an endeavor to facilitate students' understanding of the words "toppings" and "homemade". The use of simplified sentences, repetition, pausing, and emphatic stress are evident throughout his interaction with the students. Note clearly how his speech modification in line 18 results in a quick and correct response from L2 in line 19. Moreover, he uses simple words and sentences and even replaces the pronoun "them" with the noun phrase "these ingredients" which is very easy for level 104 students to understand. Also, the use of gestures when he points to the surface of the pizza perhaps contributes to students' comprehension. This shot of classroom interaction indicates that the use of simplified grammar and vocabulary, repetition, stress and slow articulation as speech modification strategies when asking questions, has an effective

role in assisting students to understand and contribute to the discussion with appropriate responses. This is apparent from students' responses in lines 13 and 19, saying "at home" and "at the top" respectively, as a result of teacher's repetition, pausing, stress and simplified short utterances in the simple present. In extract 2, the same lesson continues and TB here is introducing a new word 'anchovy' among a list of new vocabularies related to food and meals.

Extract 4:

1. T: Now (.) have you ever tried your pizza (.) with (.) anchovy? lifting hands and

2.   performing pieces or slices with his fingers while eyes moving toward students Again

3.   >have you ever (.) tried (.) or had (.) your pizza (.) with anchovy?< pointing to the word

4.   anchovy on the board. eyes on the board and then on students

5. LL: (4)

6. T: Ok (.) Is it (.) chicken: or meat? lifting and moving hands right and left ↑Try (.) to

7.   ↑guess (.), try to guess, (guys) (.) huh. Is it chicken, meat, fish…? raising his fingers one

8.   by one to show options

9. L: (ꜛFish ꜜ)

10. T: Why don't you guys- OK, guess, fish? [Chicken]?= eyes moving   on students

11. L: =[Fish]=

12. T: = meat?=

13. L: =Meat

14. T: Ok, so (.), ↑let's (.) check it (.) in your dictionary. Look up the word anchovy in your

15. dictionary (.) quickly. If you don't have a dictionary (.) °you can (.) you can share with

16. your friend °. moving hands closer to each other to show sharing

17. (7) students check the word in the dictionary

18. T: Anchovy (.) anchovy. (4) So, is it fish, meat, or chicken? eyes moving   on students

19. L: Fish.

The extract opens with the transition marker "so," followed by an elicitation request "have you ever tried your pizza with anchovy?" in which the preposition "with" is preceded and followed by a short pause to draw students' attention to the next word "anchovy." TB repeats the question again pronouncing it in slower speech pausing between phrases and using another simpler verb "had" beside the verb "tried" in lines 1-3. The students remain silent (line 5), perhaps because the word "anchovy" is a new word that they can't understand. As a result, in line 7 the teacher tries to simplify the question by giving the students an option

between two simple words "chicken" and "meat". Following a transition marker "ok", the teacher continues encouraging them to answer using the two words "try" and "guess" twice with a rising intonation in the first utterance in line 7 to make it easy for them to choose. TB repeats the options adding "fish" as a further option. One of the students guesses correctly when he says "fish" in line 9, but the teacher does not seem to notice, since the student's utterance is very softly spoken. It is clear from line 10 that the teacher is somewhat surprised by the students' silence as he seems to indicate that he feels it is not at all demanding to try and guess whether it is chicken, meat, or fish when he says, "why don't you guys guess?", and he repeats the options again. This time TB is interrupted by students trying to guess as shown in their latched turns (lines 11 & 12), one student says "fish" and another one says "meat". The teacher decides in lines 14 & 15 to have the students look up the word "anchovy" in dictionaries. While the students are checking the word, the teacher repeats and clearly articulates "anchovy" twice in line 18 with a short pause between the words and he repeats the options once again in a question form "is it fish, meat, or chicken?" As a result, one student replies "fish". Extract 2 displays some of the techniques used to modify speech in order to make it easy for students to understand and interact in classroom discussion. TB uses repetition, pausing, stress and clear pronunciation and elaboration, using simplified vocabulary and providing options to facilitate student understanding of the new word "anchovy." The elicitation requests in the first three lines, although repeated and articulated in clear and slower speech, do not help the students to understand or answer (line 5), since the main difficulty for students is in understanding the word "anchovy." The teacher immediately realizes the problem, and decides to help the students grasp its meaning by providing options of different kinds of meat, which in turn helps students to try and answer. This extract shows that the use of repetition and simplified words, "chicken" "meat" and "fish" rather than "anchovy", repeated in lines 6, 7 and 9 supports students and encourages them to contribute and produce answers (lines 11 & 13), though not necessarily correct ones. This extract also demonstrates that the occurrence of a difficult word such as "anchovy" may hinder students' participation (line 5) despite the teacher's repetition and simplified pronunciation by pausing and slow clear articulation (lines 1, 2 & 3). Extract 3 below is taken from a CEFR B1104 level class in which the teacher (TC) is practicing "giving suggestions" with seventeen students following a short grammar session. The interaction primarily occurs between the teacher and one learner at a time as he had explained that students were to be selected individually, provided with a problem and expected to formulate suggestions on that particular problem.

Extract 5:

1. T: okay, Faisal. I want—see I can't keep my money in my wallet putting his left hand on

2. his shirt pocket. I spend. I spend and I shop and shop with it moving his hand as if paying

3. money. How can I save money? (.) eyes directed to L1

4. L1: you should list about your spend. eyes to the teacher

5. T: make a list of my needs (.) all right. (2) I want to KEEP my money, putting his hands

6. close to each other to present KEEPING not spend my money moving his hands outwards

7. as if throwing

8. L1: keep the list when you spend on the u:h=

9. T: =yeah (.)

10. L1: think [about u:h]

11. T: [I have this] uh- this uh sickness in my mind, putting his hand beside his head that if I

12. have money in my wallet (.) hands on his pocket I just go:: moving rapidly onwards with

13. his hands straight to the front and shop for things that I don't need= eyes to students

14. L1: =You should to go = eyes to teacher

15. LL: = you should (……)= teacher eyes to students

16. L1: =you should go to the bank and keep it.

17. T: what was that? eyes to L1

18. L1: you should to go to the bank and keep it.

19. T: O::kay pointing towards L1 That's a good idea. Put your money in the bank. Okay.

The extract opens with a transition marker "okay" and an individual nomination of one of the students to participate in the conversation. The teacher directly provides a brief explanation of a problem saying, "I can't keep my money in my wallet" stressing on the word "can't" in line 1. He uses very simple utterances to give a clearer picture of the problem saying, "I spend I spend" and "I shop and shop" repeating each phrase twice, followed by an authentically styled indirect request for a suggestion "How can I save money?" (lines 2, 3). L1 contributes immediately without hesitation in line 4, indicated in the very short time between the two turns (.), as he seems to clearly understand the problem. The teacher repeats the student's suggestion in line 5 by reformulating it more appropriately, however, the teacher does not indicate acceptance as he says, "all right" in a lower tone and pauses for two seconds trying to make sense of the response. He subsequently attempts to provide increased clarification of the problem when he says, "I want to KEEP my money not spend my money" uttering "keep" at a higher volume and emphasizing the desire to save rather than spend through stressing the word "spend". In this turn the teacher modifies his speech using simpler grammar in a positive expression when he says, "I want to keep" rather than "I can't keep". He also emphasizes the two words "keep" and "spend" through the use of rising intonation and stress respectively. This encourages L1 to express his idea again as he tries to restate his opinion to make it more comprehensible in line 8. The student hesitates and fails to express his idea clearly indicated in his incomplete turn. The teacher's utterance "yeah" in line 9 is used as a transition marker to assist L1 to complete his train of thought/line of speech. The teacher however, does not wait for the student to complete his turn in line 10 and decides to

clarify the problem in simple language using basic vocabulary saying "if I have money in my wallet (.) I just go:: and shop for things that I don't need" to provide a clear explanation in lines 12 and 13. This modification leads the student to contribute with another more appropriate suggestion without hesitation, as indicated in his latched turns (lines 14, 16). The teacher's clear explanation with simplified language encourages other learners to proffer suggestions as is shown in their interrupting turn in line 15. This suggestion is evidently accepted by the teacher as he follows with "o::kay" stretching the first vowel and praising the student. He also repeats the contribution in paraphrased form to signify acceptance and to present the suggestion in more appropriate and simpler language (line 19). This extract demonstrates the impact of certain modification strategies being employed by the teacher on students' comprehension and contribution. Modifying speech by stressing certain words, paraphrasing and using simpler vocabulary and grammar can assist students to better understand and contribute to classroom interaction. The above analysis indicates that the teacher's attempt to modify his talk and make it more comprehensible has succeeded in encouraging and developing students' participation and guiding it towards becoming increasingly logical and acceptable. In addition, the use of hand gestures and facial expressions while explaining the problem again in line 13 perhaps played a role in accelerating students' comprehension as L1 seems to have developed a better understanding of the problem as is indicated in his latched turn (lines 14, 16) where he provides an appropriate suggestion.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study is driven by the desire to explore elements of speech modifications employed by EFL teachers in the Saudi context in order to enhance the overall learning of English as a Foreign Language. The collected data shows that the participant EFL teachers employ various linguistic and interactional strategies in modifying their speech, such as paraphrasing words and sentences, utilizing slow speech with pausing and clear articulation, repetition, emphatic stress, confirmation and comprehension checks and by using simplified vocabulary. The most common forms of teacher speech modification in the observed Saudi EFL classrooms were using simplified grammar and teachers' repetition of learners' responses. This is probably related to the perception that: "repetition is known as one type of prompt that signals an error and pushes learners to self-repair" (Lee and Lyster, 2016). The current study's data analysis also demonstrates that EFL teachers display frequent use of simplified pronunciation, by slowing speech rate and stressing certain words, and simplified vocabulary. Overall, EFL teachers in the Saudi context exhibit a higher percentage of modifying linguistic resources such as using simplified grammar and pronunciation, than modifying interactional resources through the use of clarification requests and comprehension checks. However, observing and examining the students' reactions towards the use of various modification strategies, the analysis reveals that students generally comprehend and perform better when teachers modify their talk using a simpler form and vocabulary, pause between words, repeat or stress some words and sentences. This supports Sarab & Karimi's (2008) findings that language learners understand and perform better under modified input. In addition, the present study's findings highlight the significance of second/foreign language teachers

employing certain interactional modifications, such as clarification requests and confirmation checks when negotiating meaning, in fostering language learners' comprehension and in avoiding communication breakdowns. This is in keeping with with Walsh's (2011, 2013) statement when he says that "teachers modify their interactional resources to assist comprehension and help learners navigate the discourse." (p. 7, 32). It also lends support to some studies, such as Ellis (1995), Maleki and Pazhakh (2012), and Sarab and Karimi (2008), which indicate that interactional modifications help accelerate students' comprehension and result in achieving higher scores than other students who were exposed to un-modified or linguistically modified input. However, the analysis also suggests that the occurrence of a difficult word or phrase in teachers' questions or input may hinder students' comprehension despite the teachers' effort in repeating, stressing certain words, or speaking slowly. Perhaps this finding could shed some light on the reasons why Katib and Khodabakhsh (2010) found no difference in student listening comprehension under modified speech rate, since there could be other areas of difficulty in the input, such as new or difficult words or expressions, which would impede learners' comprehension. Similar to Katib and Khodabakhsh's (2010), the present study shows that in some occasions the use of slow clear speech is almost useless. This was evident in the current study when the teacher talk contains some difficult words for learners to understand such as "anchovy" and "allowed". The data of this study also exhibits the use of some paralinguistic features which are most evident through the use of hand gestures and facial expressions by the teachers when explaining or giving instructions, which seems to facilitate students' comprehension and classroom interaction. Macedonia & Kriegste (2012) state "Foreign language teachers use gestures as a tool which favors and enhances the language acquisition process." (p. 393). The use of hand gestures in EFL for certain cultures that write their texts from right to left (eg. Arabic and Hebrew) has an influence on the EFL learners when they learn certain grammatical points in English (Matsumoto and Dobs, 2016). It is important to state some of the current study's limitations. First, the methods used for collecting the data include audio and video recordings, observation and note-taking which, although evidently valuable as research tools, might prove to be of themselves insufficient for a detailed, rigorous and comprehensive data analysis. There might well be a case argued for using additional research tools for the purposes of responding to the current research question, such as interviews and questionnaires, which could reveal additional information and further corroborate this study's findings. Second, the present study's data was collected from classroom interaction discourse of three small groups of Saudi EFL learners and three teachers. The results are based on the speech modification strategies of those three teachers only and speech modification strategies and goals could very well vary with different teachers and teaching styles, different learner profiles and proficiency, and different pedagogical goals. Moreover, although all students were from Level 104 (CEFR B/B1+), there were some variations between the classes in terms of their cognitive and linguistic abilities, which may have influenced their classroom interaction and reaction toward different modification strategies. Therefore, for future studies, it is strongly recommended that this study be replicated using a wider range of data collection methods and including a substantially larger number of students and teachers. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate students' reactions at different proficiency levels (e.g. CEFR A1, A2, B2) to

determine as to whether they would display similar or different reactions toward teacher speech modification. On a national level (i.e. the Saudi context), the findings of this study may offer implications for second language classroom pedagogy. The conversation analysis of classroom discourse and the investigation of teacher strategies in modifying their speech in the Saudi ELI context reveal essential information on the impact of these adjustments on student comprehension and classroom interaction. This information could be usefully incorporated into and utilized in teacher preparation programs in the Saudi higher educational context. A part of teacher training could be focused on effective speech modification strategies and interaction techniques, with the aim of increased levels of input comprehensibility for students and classroom discourse that is effectively conducive to learning. In addition, the results could help teachers to get an up-close understanding of the appropriate choices of linguistic and interactional modification techniques according to the varying learning/teaching scenarios they might encounter. Regarding the larger EFL community on a more global level, this study can be replicated in other EFL contexts around the world. Doing so would enable EFL teachers to relate similar classroom discourses and situations to those discussed in this study within their own context and thus, gainfully employ certain parallel multimodal interactions and pedagogical approaches to those that have proven beneficial in this study. Furthermore, it is hoped that the current study provides encouragement and inspiration to EFL/ESL teachers to explore and investigate for themselves further aspects of the fundamentals of conversation analysis in EFL/ESL classroom discourses, including more in-depth multimodal interactions relating to specific social and cultural contexts.

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Appendix A:

Teacher Speech modification

Classroom Observation Checklist

Teacher's Name: _____   Date of Observation: _____

Number of Students: _____   Venue: _____

Observation #: _____   Session Time: Morning / Afternoon

Teacher Speech Modification Strategies		Number of Times the Strategy is Used	When is it Used (exact time with minutes)	Comments on Students' Reactions Towards the Different Strategies
Modifying Linguistic Resources	Simplified Grammar			
	Simplified Pronunciation — Slow Rate of Speech			
	Simplified Pronunciation — Stress			
	Simplified Vocabulary			
Modifying Interactional Resources	Teachers' Repetition of Students' Utterances			
	Paraphrasing			
	Clarification Request			
	Confirmation Checks			
	Transition Markers			

	Teachers' Repetition of Their Own Utterances			
	Comprehension Checks			

Appendix B:

Transcription System

taken and adopted from Walsh (2013)

Symbol	Meaning
T	Teacher
L	learner (not identified)
L1 L2	identified learner
LL	several learners at once or the whole class
/ok/ok/ok/	overlapping or simultaneous utterances by more than one learner
(1.8)	Numbers enclosed in parentheses indicate a pause. The number represents the number of seconds of duration of the pause, to one decimal place. A pause of less than 0.2 seconds is marked by (.)
[ ]	Brackets around portions of utterances show that those portions overlap with a portion of another speaker's utterance.
=	An equal sign is used to show that there is no time lapse between the portions connected by the equal signs. This is used where a second speaker begins their utterance just at the moment when the first speaker finishes.
:	A colon after a vowel or a word is used to show that the sound is extended. The number of colons shows the length of the extension.
hm, hh	These are onomatopoetic representations of the audible exhalation of air
.hh	This indicates an audible inhalation of air, for example, as a gasp. The more h's, the longer the in-breath.
In bold type	editor's comments
↑↓	Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is sharply rising or falling intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.
Underlines	Underlines indicate speaker's emphasis on the underlined portion of the word.
CAPS	Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalized portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speaker's normal volume.
°	This indicates an utterance that is much softer than the normal speech of the speaker. This symbol will appear at the beginning and at the end of the utterance in question.
><, <>	'Greater than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they surround was noticeably faster, or slower than the surrounding talk.
(would)	When a word appears in parentheses, it indicates that the transcriber has guessed

as to what was said, because it was indecipherable on the tape. If the transcriber was unable to guess as to what was said, nothing appears within the parentheses.

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