



Use of Scaffolding Techniques in Teacher-Student Interaction: A Study of Teacher Talk in ESL Classes at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In Sri Lanka as well as in Asia, ESL classrooms are considered to be teacher-fronted where interaction between teachers and students is limited. Classroom interaction is believed to have an influence on L2 learners' language proficiency development, while it is also considered that scaffolding techniques used by ESL teachers could be helpful for ESL learners in developing their language proficiency. The aim of this study is to identify the scaffolding techniques used by the instructors in ESL classes at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. This study adopts the mixed methods approach encompassing classroom observations, recordings of ESL lessons, and interviews with eight instructors. The main data is based on the classroom discourse delivered by four ESL instructors to around 200 students from three proficiency levels. The classroom discourse of selected four ESL classes conducted by four instructors was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The results revealed that the instructors employed several scaffolding techniques during their ESL classes. However, the pattern of interaction that takes place is the traditional IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) that the exchanges are mere question and answer sequences. The findings of this study also reaffirm that in Sri Lankan ESL classrooms, the instructors are inclined to use display questions more prevalently that, in a way, seems to suppress the development of classroom interaction from taking place at a deeper level. This study also recommends some practical means of developing interaction through scaffolding techniques. Hence, further studies are needed to identify the scaffolding techniques in a broader context within Sri Lankan ESL classrooms and develop an intervention to train the ESL instructors to effectively use the scaffolding techniques in ESL classes.

Keywords: Scaffolding Techniques, Interaction, Display Questions, Referential Questions, ESL Classes