

ENGLISH CLASSROOM INTERACTION FROM AN IRF PERSPECTIVE IN A NON-NATIVE ESL SETTING

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1128>

Received: 25 October 2025/Published: 02 December 2025

ABSTRACT

What actually shapes students' understanding and participation in the learning process is the structure of the classroom interaction which can take different structural dimensions such as the IRF (Initiation, Response and Feedback). Using Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) benchmark model of describing classroom discourse interactions, this study investigates the way teachers and students of CCAS Kumba initiate, respond to, and provide feedback for effective language transaction. It analyses the factors that influence the structure of classroom interactions, bringing to fore the patterns of discourse structure that are predominantly used in the classroom. Primary data was collected through direct observation and audio recording of 20 classroom sessions, selected using the simple random sampling technique. Data analysis was done using the SPSS software program, Version 12.0. From a qualitative perspective, it was realised that the IRF structure displayed different acts within the various moves: the Initiation move carried acts such as nomination, directing, and prompting; the Response move had replying and reacting as acts, while within the Feedback move acts such as acceptance, praise, criticism, and expansion were observable. This result is indicative of the fact that there were more initiation and feedback acts than response acts, hence, the teachers dominated classroom interaction. Quantitatively, It was realised that there are diverse patterns of classroom interaction all being variants of the IRF sequence. These patterns of interaction are the IIR (6%), IRR (3%), IF (3%), IRRF (3%), IIRF (3%), IRF (23%) and IR (59%). From the results and contrary to what upholds in the West (see White 2003 and Zhang et al 2007) where the most widely used pattern of interaction in ENL classrooms is IRF/IRE, this study found out that the predominantly used pattern of interaction in ESL classrooms in CCAS Kumba is IR, even though a variant of the most acclaimed IRF pattern. Based on the results, the dominant IR (59%) reveals a dominance of teacher-initiated interactions and limited student-student engagement. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers, especially at the high school level, should endeavour to reinforce the response move and vary the acts because it has the potential to turn the classroom transaction into learner- centred.

Keywords: Classroom, Interaction, Non-native, ESL setting, students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction is very useful as an educational strategy to enhance students' learning process. According to Taous (2013), this interaction plays a significant role in the process of learning through which learners are given opportunity to receive the input provided by the teacher. Conversation is the mainstay of a learning environment which takes place within a physical

classroom space for the most part. Teachers and students advance the educational agenda primarily through face-to-face interaction, and it is this interaction itself that puts teaching and learning into action. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate how teachers and students organise their talk to achieve specific learning goals. Such investigation becomes crucial in an ESL (English as Second Language) environment in which language is both the means of teaching and learning as well as the object. When people talk, they tend to adopt some regular patterns of conversational organisation, hence, discourse structure. The study of classroom discourse is the study of the process of face-to-face classroom teaching. In the presence of various conceptions of language learning on the one hand, and various methodological approaches to the teaching of second language on the other hand, the investigation of classroom conversation appears all more important. As Nuthall (2012) notes correctly, the verbal interaction between teachers and students had an underlying structure that was much the same in all classrooms and at all grade levels in English speaking countries. In essence, the author notes that the teacher asks a question, one or two students answer the question, then the teacher comments on the answers the students have given (in some case summarizing what has been said), and then asks another question. This pattern repeats itself in a cyclic way with significant variations throughout the course of the lesson. Ellis (2004) asserts that interactionists view language learning as an outcome of participating in face-to-face interaction, hence, the importance of interaction in the language classroom. Thus, as learners interact with another, they receive input and produce output. Nunan (1991) opines that language is acquired as learners actively engage and interact with each other to communicate in the target language. In addition, social-interactionists see language as a rule-governed cultural activity learned in interaction with others. The analysis of classroom discourse spans a considerable variety of educational contexts, countries, and languages. Given the importance of issue, this article attempts an examination of the discourse patterns that informs classroom interactions in Cameroon College of Arts and Science (CCAS) Kumba.

2. BACKGROUND

Classroom discourse seems to offer autonomy and opportunity to teaching and learning interaction between student-teacher and student-student. It is significant to realize that learners are able to relate to classrooms that are lively and are learner-centred with meaningful communication. Learners take control and responsibility for their own learning, both in terms of what they learn and how they learn. Classroom discourse facilitates teaching and learning interactions between students and teachers, allowing for both structured and dynamic exchanges. In this sense, Hardman (2016) observes that high quality talk between the teacher and student(s) provides a fertile ground for an active, highly collaborative and cognitively stimulating learning process that leads to improved learning outcomes. The three-part exchange structure therefore serves as a pedagogical tool and enables the teacher to understand the structure of communication between him/her and students. The three-part exchange structure is part of a comprehensive model developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). While it was used as a 'starting point' for discourse analysis, it has actually become a stepping stone for the development of other new models of analysing classroom discourse. In their work, they came up with a framework to analyse the English used by teachers and pupils during classroom discourse. Their system of ranks has a rank scale made up of five ranks. This is illustrated as:

Lesson Transaction Exchange Move Act

The diagram shows that several acts make up a move; a build-up of moves results in an exchange; different exchanges form a transaction, with a build-up of transactions making up a lesson. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and others have been able to summarise a typical classroom discourse structure as constituting of three turns: teacher's initiation – ask a question (I), students' response(R) and teacher's feedback (F) or evaluation of the student's response (E) - IRF/IRE. Sinclair and Brazil (1982), illustrates how classroom conversations typically proceed through structured exchanges of initiation, response, and feedback. Every exchange is initiated, whether with statement, questions or command; response might be in words or action and feedback functions to close an exchange. The focus of this study shall be on the Exchange and Move.

3. AIMS OF THE STUDY

Many authors advocate for the universal application of the IRF/IRE model in classroom settings. White (2003) and Zhang et al (2007) seem to agree that the IRF/IRE model is effective for structuring classroom discourse and recommending that the IRF/IRE patterns be implemented across the board in all teacher-learners classroom conversations. However, this raises a key question about how the IRF/IRE model applies to different educational contexts. This study, therefore, aims to analyze the structure of classroom interaction at CCAS Kumba employing Sinclair's five rank scale. The study equally identifies the factors that influence the classroom interaction structures and determines the predominant discourse patterns used by teachers during classroom transaction.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the aims of the study, the following research questions are addressed:

- What are the exchange structures that occur during teachers-students classroom transaction in CCAS Kumba?
- What are the cultural, pedagogical, and institutional factors that influence the structure of classroom interactions in CCAS Kumba?
- Which specific exchange structure dominates in the classroom interactions in CCAS Kumba?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of classroom discourse at CCAS Kumba and contribute to the understanding of how discourse frameworks can be adapted to different educational contexts and environment.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ever since the American structuralism linguist Zellig Harris proposed the term “discourse analysis”, there has been more and more relevant research. In 1970s, discourse analysis became an independent discipline, which was studied by researchers from different perspectives. The Birmingham school in the UK represented by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) attached great importance to the description of the structure of information. One of the most acknowledged and significant language teaching theory, which they developed, is the Initiation, Response, Feedback or Evaluation (IRF/IRE) Model. The **Initiation, Response, Feedback (IRF)** or **Initiation, Response, Evaluation (IRE)** Model, developed by Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975, is a foundational theory in language teaching and classroom discourse analysis. The IRF/IRE Model

is highly influential in understanding the dynamics of classroom interactions, particularly in teacher-fronted language instruction. This model identifies a regular structure in teacher-student interactions, where the teacher **initiates** (I) the conversation by posing a question or making a statement, the student **responds** (R) to the initiation, and the teacher then **evaluates** (E) or provides **feedback** (F) on the student's response. They analyzed abundant classroom discourses and set up a five-scale analysis mode: **lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act**. According to this model, acts are the smallest units. That is, several acts make up a move; a build-up of moves results in an exchange; different exchanges form a transaction, with a build-up of transactions making up a lesson.

This exchange structure is crucial for guiding classroom interactions and has been a central concept in discourse analysis (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979). The IRF/IRE Model was initially proposed as a descriptive system to characterize and analyze the verbal exchanges between teachers and students. The model posits that classroom discourse often follows a cyclical pattern where the teacher's initiation prompts a student response, which is then evaluated or followed up by the teacher. This pattern is considered a fundamental aspect of teacher-student interactions and has been widely observed in various educational settings (Giordan, 2003). Despite its widespread use, the generalizability of the IRF/IRE Model has been a subject of debate. (Walsh, 2011; Mercer, 2013). Some scholars question whether this model, which was primarily developed based on studies in Western educational contexts, can be applied to different cultural and institutional settings This study seeks to explore these issues by examining the applicability of the IRF/IRE Model at CCAS Kumba.

6. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The IRF model is central to understanding classroom conversation, particularly in L2 settings. Alexander (2000) explored how teachers' questioning techniques vary across cultures and how these differences impact classroom discourse For example, in Russian classrooms, Alexander observed that teachers' questions elicited long, thoughtful responses, which is a variation of the IRF model where the response extends into collaborative problem-solving. Dagarin (2004) observes that classroom interaction is a two-way process between the participants in the learning process. This process may involve not just the teacher and the pupil, but also between or among pupils. As such, Goronga (2013) observes that it is through classroom interaction that pupils are encouraged to get involved in the teaching and learning process. Apart from this, pupils also become comfortable to talk, rather than just reacting to the teacher's instructions or prompts. Aman et al (2006) argue that classroom discourse offers autonomy and opportunities for meaningful interactions, which can be seen as a contrast to the more rigid IRF model. Such classroom discourse makes possible situations in which learning becomes more fun, students' participation is active and teaching learning activities are effective. Moreover, such situations allow teachers to fine tune their speech according students' progress. Chouliaraki (1998) emphasizes the importance of fine-tuning in classroom interactions to improve student understanding, a concept that challenges the fixed structure of the IRF model. Studies such as Li, 2018; Sert, 2019 have shown that interaction between the teacher and the student as a teaching pedagogical tool plays a very significant role as far as the language acquisition process is concerned. However, Chouliaraki (1998) describes classroom discourse as occurring in a transparent context where interactions focus on specific subject matter as well as well-known interlocutors, a view that aligns with

Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model. The IRF model, developed by Sinclair and Coulthard, breaks down classroom discourse into initiation moves, response moves, and follow-up moves, which together structure teacher-student interactions. This three-move structure of an exchange (IRF) is commonly cited and is characteristic of teacher-led discourse, in which the teacher asks a question or provides information (I), the student responds or reacts (R), and the teacher provides some degree of comment or evaluation (F/E). In addition, Ramirez-Verdugo & Castellano (2021) observe that interactional practices can be applied in the language classroom so as to respond to the goal of L2 teaching and to help improve teaching and learning. Wanji (2024) investigated the discourse structure of classroom conversation in GBHS Yaounde. Brazil (1995) explains that the IRF model allows teachers to guide students towards discovering knowledge themselves, a process that highlights the model's role in structuring classroom interactions. Consequently, the IRF model is of value to teachers wanting to understand the dynamics of classroom communication, to discover "whether there is a proper equilibrium or imbalance between real communication and teacher talk" as exemplified in (McCathy 1991:18). Therefore, the current study aims to fill the literature gap by using a quantitative and qualitative case study design to examine the nature of IRF patterning in the ESL classroom in Cameroon particularly in CCAS Kumba and to reveal the socio-pedagogic factors that influences classroom transactions.

7. METHODOLOGY

Primary data was collected through direct observation of English language classes at CCAS Kumba, a Secondary-High school in Cameroon. This method was chosen to capture authentic classroom interactions and discourse patterns. The researcher observed and audio-recorded English language classes across various levels of language competence to gather a comprehensive view of classroom discourse practices. Different classes were chosen to ensure a representative sample of the discourse patterns at CCAS Kumba. A total of 20 classroom sessions were observed and audio-recorded to ensure a broad and representative sample of classroom discourse. All the recordings were transcribed using verbatim technique. These lessons were basically grammar and vocabulary. In all, twenty classroom sessions were studied, both from Upper sixth and Lower sixth, and the audio-recorded data was entered into SPSS (version 12.0) for analysis. The software was used to generate graphs and statistical summaries to visualize and interpret the data. Data analysis was guided by Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) Five Exchange Rank Move Model, which provided a framework for identifying patterns in classroom interactions and understanding the structure of discourse. SPSS was used to run statistical tests, including chi-square tests, to examine the frequency of IRF/IRE patterns and test the hypothesis concerning the predominance of the IRF model in classroom discourse. While 20 lessons were observed and recorded, a detailed analysis was conducted on 4 lessons due to constraints of time and resources. This sample was chosen to represent the broader data collected. The study area was chosen purposively giving that it was the author's alma mater hence permission to carryout research was made easy. These lessons came from Lower and Upper sixth classes offering English 730. The lessons were analyzed to identify the IRF/IRE patterns and other discourse moves and acts reflecting the theoretical framework.

8. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The first excerpt contains a classroom discourse in Upper sixth Arts of CCAS Kumba, initiated by a question asked by the teacher and then followed by the students' responses. The Lesson was on Passive Voice. The focus is on the discourse pattern used in this language learning situation.

The following meanings are given to the following abbreviations: **I=Initiation**, **R= Response**, **F= Feedback**, **T= Teacher** and **S=Student**. The discussions went as follows:

I-T: What did we say a passive voice is?

R-S: It is a sentence with the voice in the past.

F-T: No!

I-T: Can you make a sentence in the passive voice?

R-S: John killed the goat.

R-S: The student went home after class.

F-T: No!

R-S: The blackboard was wiped

F-T: Clap for her

I-T: Ok another example of a sentence in the passive?

R-S: The building was renovated

R-S: Mr Ngong is respected by the students.

F-T: Excellent! There are many other examples.

I-T: Someone should tell us when the passive voice is used?

I-T: Did you get the question?

R-S: When the actor is not known

I-T: Another situation of use?

I-T: I need another situation of use class.

R-S: When we seek to emphasize action rather than the actor.

F-T: Thanks very much, my students are doing well.

F-T: So, we say to form the passive voice, we use a form of 'to be' and the past participle of the verb....

From the following excerpt, we have noticed that there are several patterns of interactions. Analysis of the excerpt reveals several interaction patterns, including IRRF (2 instances), IIR (1 instance), IIRF (1 instance), and IRF (2 instances). The IRF sequence appears twice, indicating a common structure in the teacher-student interactions during the lesson. In this excerpt, the teacher initiates interactions primarily through questions. Students respond, and the teacher provides feedback, which includes remarks (e.g., 'No!'), praise (e.g., 'Excellent!'), or comments. (e.g. 'Thanks very much, my students are doing well'). From the interaction, one realizes that "What did we say a passive voice is?" is an **Initiation**, 'It is a sentence with the voice in the past.' is a **Response** (even though erroneous), and 'No!' is a **Follow-up**." The teacher does not always provide evaluative comments after each student's response. Feedback is given after several questions have been asked, highlighting a pattern where feedback is reserved for summarizing or praising multiple responses."

Analysis of Interaction Patterns:

In this lesson, several interaction patterns can be identified, reflecting different aspects of the IRF model. The patterns observed include:

1. Patterns of Interaction:

- **IRF Pattern (2 instances, 33%):** The IRF sequence is evident in two instances throughout the lesson. This pattern typically consists of the teacher's initiation, the students' responses, and the teacher's feedback:
 - **Example 1:**
 - **I:** What did we say a passive voice is?"
 - **R:** "It is a sentence with the voice in the past"
 - **F:** "No"
- **IRRF Pattern (2 instances, 33%):** The IRRF pattern, which involves the teacher's initiation followed by the students' responses (two), and then a feedback is the most prevalent interaction pattern in this lesson measuring up only to the IRF pattern.
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** "Another example of a sentence in the passive?"
 - **R:** "The building was renovated."
 - **R:** "Mr Ngong is respected by the students."
 - **F:** "Excellent, there are many other examples"
- **IIR Pattern (1 instance, 17%):** The IIR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question, and after a response, provides a follow-up, is less common:
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** "Someone should tell us when the passive voice is used?"
 - **I:** "Did you get the question?"
 - **R:** "When the actor is not known"
- **IIRF Pattern (1 instance, 17%):** The IIRF pattern, where the teacher initiates a task and provides follow-up feedback, is also less common:
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** "Another situation of use?"
 - **I:** "I need another situation of use class"
 - **R:** "When we seek to emphasize action rather than the actor"
 - **F:** "Thanks very much, my students are doing well."
 -

2. Types of Feedback:

- **Rejection:** For example, "No"
- **Encouragement:** For example, "Clap for him"
- **Appreciation:** For example, "Excellent"
- **Appreciation:** For example, "Thanks very much, my students are doing well"

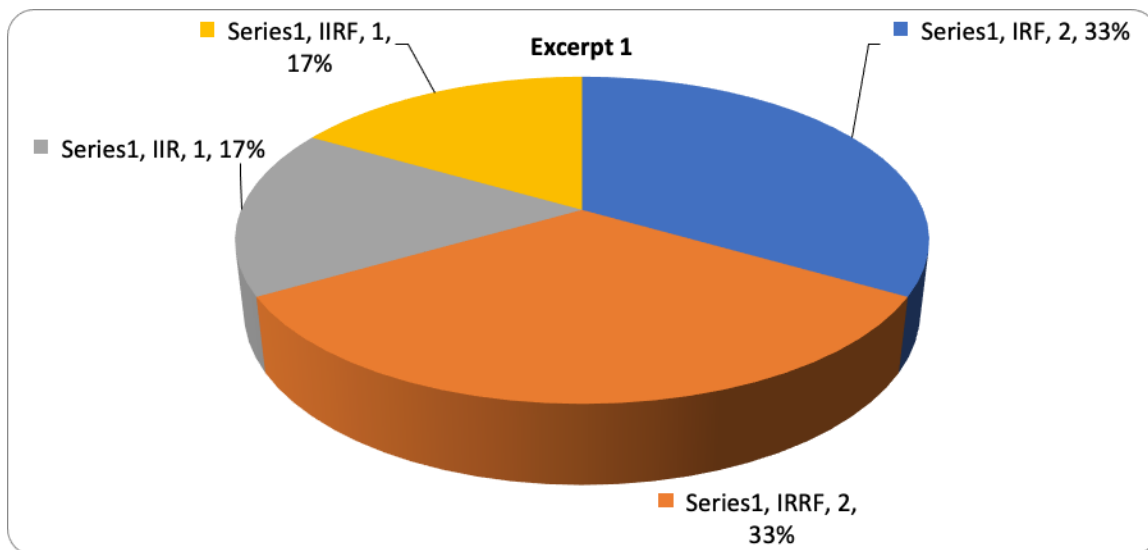
3. Statistical Analysis:

- The **IRF** and the **IRRF** sequences appear at a moderate rate of 33%, indicating that while these patterns are present, they constitute the dominant structure in the observed interaction.
- The **IIR** and **IIRF** patterns occur less frequently, each at 17%. This low frequency suggests that the tripartite IRF model is not consistently applied throughout this lesson and that the teacher's role is more focused on initiating questions and providing immediate feedback rather than engaging in extended follow-ups.

4. Interpretation of Patterns:

- The high frequency of the **IRF** and **IRRF** pattern reflects a lesson structure where the teacher primarily initiates questions and receives students' answers, with an interest on providing feedback or follow-up. This may be attributed to the nature of the lesson, which is more focused on testing knowledge already acquired rather than exploring deeper understanding.
- The moderate presence of the **IIR** and **IIRF** patterns indicates that while the IRF model is used, it is not the exclusive or dominant mode of interaction in this lesson.
- The low occurrences of **IIR** and **IIRF** patterns suggest that the lesson's design prioritized direct questioning and correction over interactive or exploratory dialogue.

The teacher does not provide an evaluative comment each time the students respond. It occurs after a number of questions have been asked. Additionally, there are instances of bound initiations, where the teacher rephrases a question or redirects it to another student if the initial response is incorrect or absent.



As shown in the graph above, the IRF and IRRF patterns each occur at a high rate of 33%, indicating a predominant structure in the observed classroom interaction. In contrast, the IIRF and IIR patterns occur at a lower rate of 17%, suggesting that these structures are less common in the teacher-student interactions observed during the study.

The next lesson that was observed was on English Indirect Speech at Lower sixth Arts CCAS Kumba. This example is selected to further illustrate the variations in classroom interaction patterns and the use of the IRF model in different teaching contexts.

I-T: Dear students, we are going to be studying a new concept in English grammar. Read the

- statements on the board.
- R-S:** “I’m hungry” Paul said.
- I-T:** What did Paul say?
- R-S:** Paul said he was hungry.
- F-T:** This means that one person is reporting what the other person has said in his or her own Words. Paul said this, and Mary is reporting what Paul said. Ok!
- I-T:** Yes, Mukete go on and read.
- R-S:** “I am going to London”.
- I-T:** Sone what did Mukete say?
- R-S:** She said that she was going to London.
- F-T:** This means that Sone is not the author of the sentence but he is only reporting what another has said.
- I-T:** Why did we not use ‘he’ this time?
- R-S:** Because Mukete is a girl.
- I-T:** “We were too late to be winners”. Consider that two boys just returned from the mountain race and they made this statement. If I ask you what they said, what will you say?
- R-S:** They said that they were too late to be winners.
- I-T:** Alright! Take down the following sentences and render them into direct speech. You have 5 minutes to do the exercise.
- I-T:** Who has finished? Read yours Bertrand then Elvis.
- R-S:** (read)
- R-S:** (read)
- F-T:** Bertrand is on the tract, but Elvis did not follow the instructions ...now lets look at something else.
- I-T:** Take this!
- Celestine: I am not going to class this afternoon
- David: Hope you don’t want to miss out on the CA?
- Celestine: I am not prepared for the test.
- I-T:** Look at these sentences and report them. Put them into the reported speech.
- I-T:** Who has finished?
- I-T:** Mary?
- R-S:** No sir
- I-T:** Hands up all those who have finished.
- F-T:** Ok, go ahead.

In this excerpt, the IRF sequence, as described by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), is evident in two instances. This pattern highlights how the teacher’s questions and students’ responses are structured to achieve specific teaching objectives. Here, we notice that initiation can either be an instruction given by the teacher or a question asked by him or her. The responses in this excerpt predominantly serve to answer the teacher’s questions or follow instructions, which limits variability in student contributions and reflects a more rigid application of the IRF pattern.

Analysis of Discourse Patterns:

In this lesson, several interaction patterns can be identified, reflecting different aspects of the IRF model. The patterns observed include:

1. Patterns of Interaction:

- a. **IRF Pattern (2 instances, 22%):** The IRF sequence is evident in three instances throughout the lesson. This pattern typically consists of the teacher's initiation, the students' responses, and the teacher's feedback:

i. **Example 1:**

1. **I:** "Sone what did Mukete say?"
2. **R:** "She said that she was going to London."
3. **F:** "This means that Sone is not the author of the sentence but he is only reporting what another has said."

- b. **IR Pattern (4 instances, 45%):** The IR pattern, which involves the teacher's initiation followed by the students' responses, is the most prevalent interaction pattern in this lesson:

i. **Example:**

1. **I:** "Dear students, we are going to be studying a new concept in English grammar. Read the statements on the board."
2. **R:** "I'm hungry" Paul said."

- c. **IIR Pattern (1 instance, 11%):** The IIR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question, and after a response, provides a follow-up, is less common:

Example: I: Look at these sentences and report them. Put them into the reported speech.

I: Who has finished?

I: Mary?

R: No sir

- d. **IF Pattern (1 instance, 11%):** The IF pattern, where the teacher initiates a task and provides follow-up feedback, is also less common:

i. **Example:**

1. **I:** "Hands up all those who have finished."
2. **F:** "Ok, go ahead."

*** IRRF Pattern (1 instance, 11%):** Here, the teacher Initiates a question then solicits multiple responses and provide feedback.

Example:

1. "Who has finished? Read yours Bertrand then Elvis."
2. Read

3. Read

4. Bertrand is on the tract, but Elvis did not follow the instructions ...now lets look at something else.

2. Types of Feedback:

a. **Explanations:** For example, "This means that one person is reporting what the other person has said in his or her own words ok. Paul said this and Mary is telling us what Paul said"

b. **Concord:** For example, "Ok, go ahead"

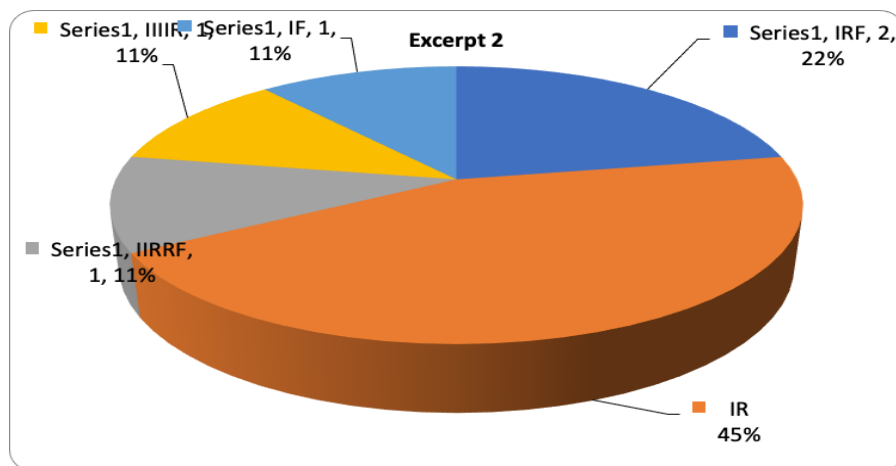
3. Statistical Analysis:

a. The most predominantly used pattern in the lesson was the IR (45%). This is followed by the IRF pattern occurring 2 times for a percentage rate of 22%. The prevalence of IR patterns (45%) suggests that the teacher's questions and students' responses are the most common form of interaction.

b. The **IIIR**, **IIRF** and **IF** patterns occur infrequently, each at 11%. This low frequency suggests that the tripartite IRF model is not consistently applied throughout this lesson and that the teacher's role is more focused on asking questions rather than providing immediate feedback and follow-ups.

4. Interpretation of Patterns:

The responses in this excerpt predominantly serve to answer the teacher's questions or follow instructions, which limits variability in student contributions and reflects a more rigid application of the IRF pattern. Concerning the follow-up, they vary as they could be explanations, comments, approvals or refusals. The analysis of this excerpt reveals a range of interaction patterns: IR (4 instances), IIRF (1 instance), IIIR (1 instance), and IF (1 instance). The high frequency of IR interactions (45%) compared to the less frequent IF, IIIR, and IIRF patterns (11% each) illustrates the predominant use of the IR sequence in this classroom. In this excerpt, the IR pattern occurs at a high rate of 45%, indicating that the IR model is a dominant interaction structure. Conversely, the lower occurrence rates of IF, IIIR, and IIRF (11% each) suggest these patterns are less common, which may reflect specific teaching strategies or classroom dynamics.



The third lesson under study was based on English pronouns. The teacher was revising a test he had earlier administered to the students on pronouns.

I-T: Section A requires you to state seven types of pronouns you know. So, those on the first and second desk should list them.

R-S: Personal pronoun.

R-S: Possessive pronoun.

R-S: Reflexive pronoun.

R-S: Reciprocal Pronoun.

R-S: Interrogative pronoun.

R-S: Relative pronoun.

R-S: Indefinite pronoun.

I-T: Using our knowledge of these pronouns, let us attempt the answers to the following questions: This is the teacher told me my son has been misbehaving in class.

R-S: "who"

I-T: Ndongmo did you hear?

R-S: No sir!

R-S: "who"

I-T: This is the girl.... car hit that tree down last week.

R-S: 'Whose'

I-T: Decompression sickness manifests ... with joint pain, and it can be fatal.

R-S: "itself"

F-T: ... so it manifests itself with joint pains.

I-T: Father is speaking to John and....

R-S: "me"

F-T: Father is speaking to John and me not I, because it is the objective case.

F-T: Check your papers, do you have all the answers correct. If you identify any errors come forth with your paper.

I-T: Let us now move to section B. Choose the right option from the brackets. Remember this is on prepositions.

I-T: John is the bus

R-S: "in"

I-T: Is that correct?

R-S: No sir

I-T: Why do you say so?

R-S: Because the right answer is "on"

F-T: On?

I-T: Why do you say so?

R-S: Because any means of transportation that one can move within it, we say you are 'on' and not 'in'

I-T: Will you come ... me to the store?

R-S: with

I-T: He is good Math.

R-S: "at"

In this excerpt, we notice that we can still find the IRF sequence. The sequence occurs three times at an average rate of 27%. This exchange is mainly characterized by Initiation and Response IR

(7) with a high rate of 64%. The IIR is the least and occurs only once with a very low rate of 9%. Here, the tripartite sequence is not consistent. The teacher's focus is on asking questions and providing almost no reply or comment to the students' responses. This could be as a result of the type of lesson going on.

Analysis of Discourse Patterns:

In this lesson, several interaction patterns can be identified, reflecting different aspects of the IRF model. The patterns observed include:

5. Patterns of Interaction:

- a. **IRF Pattern (3 instances, 27%):** The IRF sequence is evident in three instances throughout the lesson. This pattern typically consists of the teacher's initiation, the students' responses, and the teacher's feedback:

- i. **Example 1:**

1. **I:** "Decompression sickness manifests.... with joint pain, and it can be fatal"
 2. **R:** "itself"
 3. **F:** "... so it manifests itself with joint pains."

- ii. **Example 2:**

1. **I:** "John is ... the bus."
 2. **R:** "in"
 3. **F:** "Is that correct?"

- b. **IR Pattern (7 instances, 64%):** The IR pattern, which involves the teacher's initiation followed by the students' responses, is the most prevalent interaction pattern in this lesson:

- i. **Example:**

1. **I:** "Why do you say so?"
 2. **R:** "Because any means of transportation that one can move within it, we say you are 'on' not 'in'."

- c. **IIR Pattern (1 instance, 9%):** The IIR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question, and after a response, provides a follow-up, is less common:

- i. **Example:**

1. **I:** "Why do you say so?"
 2. **R:** "Because the right answer is 'on'"
 3. **F:** "on?"

- d. **IF Pattern (1 instance, 9%):** The IF pattern, where the teacher initiates a task and provides follow-up feedback, is also less common:

- i. **Example:**

1. **I:** "Father is speaking to John and"
 2. **F:** "Father is speaking to John and 'me' not 'I', because it is the objective case."

6. Types of Feedback:

- a. **Explanations:** For example, "Check your papers, do you have all the answers correct?"
- b. **Comments:** For example, "Is that correct?"

c. **Clarifications:** For example, “Why do you say so?”

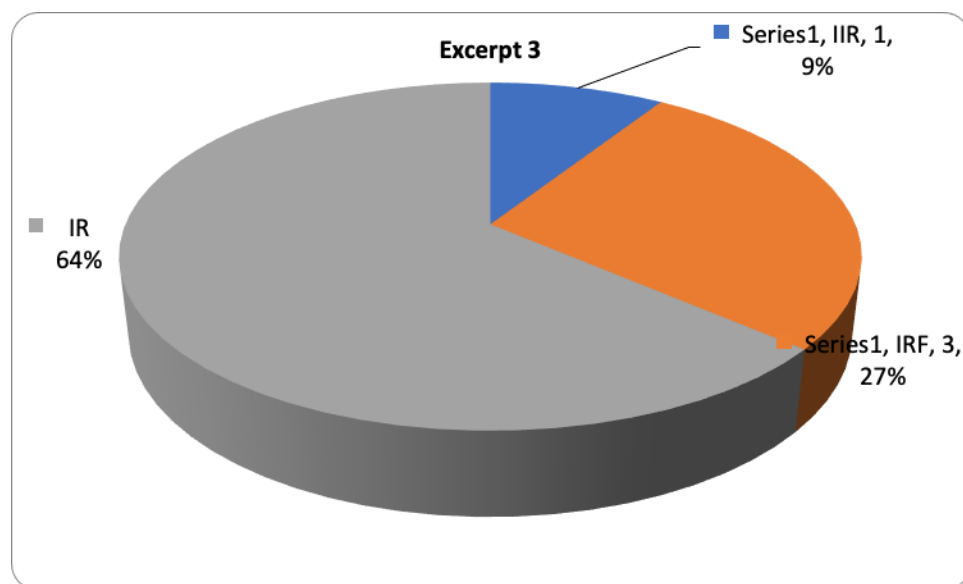
7. Statistical Analysis:

- The **IRF** sequence appears at a moderate rate of 27%, indicating that while this pattern is present, it is not the dominant structure in the observed discourse. The prevalence of IR patterns (64%) suggests that the teacher’s questions and students’ responses are the most common form of interaction.
- The **IIR** and **IF** patterns occur infrequently, each at 9%. This low frequency suggests that the tripartite IRF model is not consistently applied throughout this lesson and that the teacher's role is more focused on asking questions and providing immediate feedback rather than engaging in extended follow-ups.

8. Interpretation of Patterns:

- The high frequency of the **IR** pattern reflects a lesson structure where the teacher primarily initiates questions and receives students’ answers, with minimal feedback or follow-up. This may be attributed to the nature of the lesson, which is more focused on testing knowledge rather than exploring deeper understanding.
- The moderate presence of the **IRF** pattern indicates that while the IRF model is used, it is not the exclusive or dominant mode of interaction in this lesson.
- The low occurrences of **IIR** and **IF** patterns suggest that the lesson’s design prioritized direct questioning and correction over interactive or exploratory dialogue.

The data from this lesson demonstrates that while the IRF model is present, it is not the predominant interaction pattern. Instead, the IR structure is more frequently used, reflecting a lesson focused on knowledge recall and correction. The low incidence of the IIR and IF patterns indicates that the lesson’s discourse was primarily oriented towards direct questioning and immediate feedback, consistent with the lesson's focus on test revision rather than extended interaction.



The last lesson of the corpus was on collective nouns. The lesson was a grammar lesson.

I-T: What is collective noun Paul?

R-S: A collective noun is used to name a group of people or things.

F-T: Good

I-T: Give some examples.

R-S: A pride, for a group of lions.

F-T: Very good. And you Mankaa.

R-S: Troop

F-T: Yes, troop of monkeys

I-T: Now, What is the difference between collective nouns and compound nouns?

R-S: Collective nouns designates a group of people or thing, compounds state their singular form.

F-T: No!

I-T: Who else?

S: (silence)

F-T: Your definition of collective noun is right. But compound nouns are formed by bringing more than one noun together. We did this last week. Check your notes.

I-T: Who can give us an example?

R-S: Major General, Chief Judge, sister-in-law

F-T: Very good

I-T: Class, when collective nouns are used as subject of a sentence, do they agree with a plural verb or a singular verb?

I-T: Which verb do they concord with?

R-S: They concord with the singular verb.

I-T: Give us an example sentence to demonstrate that?

R-S: (hands up)

I-T: Yes, Sebastian?

R-S: The swarm of bees have moved southwards.

I-T: No! Your sentence rather has a plural verb Sebastian. The right sentence would be 'The swarm of bees has moved southwards.'

I-T: Can you think of another example sentence?

R-S: The team of players has just arrived for the match.

R-S: A gang of bandits was taken to the police station.

I-T: Can you clap for them

R-S: (clap)

In this lesson, various interaction patterns can be identified, reflecting different aspects of the IRF model. The patterns observed include the following as exemplified in the analysis.

1. Patterns of Interaction:

- **IRF Pattern (4 instances, 44%):** The IRF sequence is present, showing a typical structure of initiation, student response, and teacher feedback:

- **Example 1:**

- **I:** "What is a collective noun, Paul?"
- **R:** "A collective noun is used to name a group of people or things."
- **F:** "Good"

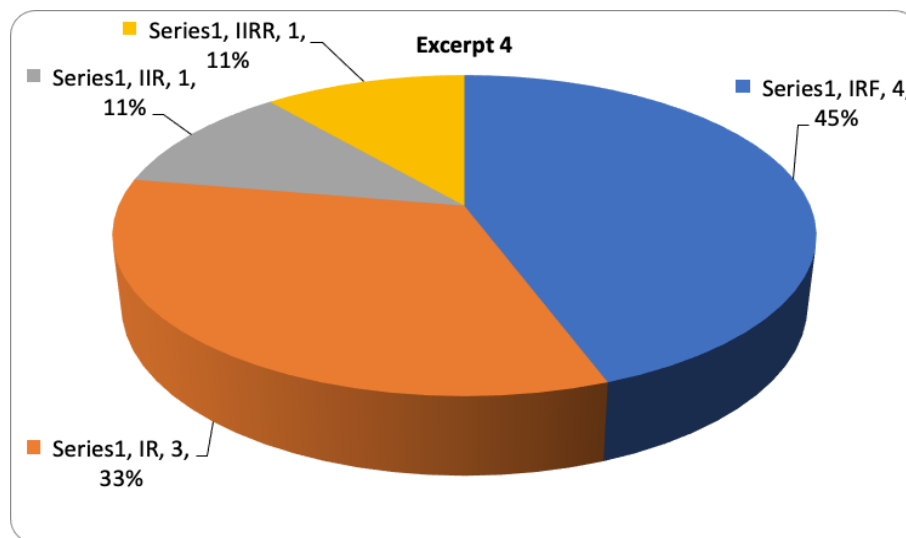
- **Example 2:**
 - **I:** “Give some examples”
 - **R:** “A pride, for a group of lions”
 - **F:** “Very good. And you Mankaa?”
- **IR Pattern (3 instances, 33%):** The IR pattern, where the teacher’s initiation is followed by the students’ responses, occurs second to the IRF pattern:
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** “Give us an example sentence to demonstrate that?”
 - **R:** “The swarm of bees have moved southwards.”
- **IIR Pattern (1 instance, 11%):** The IIR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher follows up, occurs once:
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** “Class, when collective nouns are used as subject of a sentence, do they agree with a plural verb or a singular verb?”
 - **I:** “which verb do they concord with?”
 - **R:** “They concord with the singular verb”
- **IIRR Pattern (1 instance, 11%):** The IIRR pattern, where the teacher initiates a topic and provides follow-up feedback, is also present:
 - **Example:**
 - I:** ‘No. Your sentence rather has a plural verb Sebastian. The right sentence would be ‘The swarm of bees has moved southwards’
 - I:** “Can you think of another example sentence?”
 - R:** “The team of players has just arrived for the match.”
 - R:** “A gang of bandits was taken to the police station.

2. Types of Feedback

- **Approval:** For example, “Good” and “Very good”
- **Correction:** For example, “No, your sentence has a plural verb Sebastian”
- **Clarification:** For example, “Can you think of another example?”
- **Encouragement:** For example, “Can you clap for them”
- **Explanation:** For example, “Your definition of collective noun is right. But compound nouns are formed by bringing more than one noun together. We did this last week. Check your notes.”

3. Statistical Analysis:

- The **IRF** pattern appears at a rate of 45%, demonstrating that the teacher frequently uses this structure for interaction. This high frequency indicates that the teacher often initiates questions, receives answers, and provides feedback.
- The **IR** pattern occurs at a lower rate of 33%, coming next to the IRF pattern reflecting less frequent use of this interaction pattern where the teacher initiates and the student responds without further feedback.
- The **IIR** and **IIRRF** patterns each occur at a rate of 11%, suggesting that these patterns are less common but still present in the lesson's discourse.



The IRF sequence occurs four times in this excerpt, the IR (3), IIR (1) and IIRR (1). There are some variations here as we notice that some of the students' responses are either gestures (raising their hands up) or total silence. In this forth example, the teacher asks a question and the students remain silent, so the teacher answers his own question several seconds later and then starts another exchange. Both the IRF and IR are used regularly and occur at high rates of 45% and 33% respectively.

There are some rare situations where the students can equally initiate a discourse, especially when they do not understand the teacher's question. The excerpt below elucidates this phenomenon:

I-T: Our lesson of today is on Heterophones. All repeat.

R-S: Heterophones

I-T: Can you give me an example of an heterophone?

R-S: Do you mean homophones Madam?

F-T: Well, heterophones and homophones are words with different sense relations ok?

I-T: Now, can you give me an example of an heterophone?

R-S: Tear fluid from the eye and tear pull apart.

F-T: Well done, clap for her.

F-T: We said that heterophones are words that are spelt the same but are pronounced differently and have different meanings. They help to increase our vocabulary power.

I-T: Who can give us more examples? I need two examples per column.

R-S: wind and wind

I-T: What does that mean?

R-S: Madam, wind is a moving body of air. And wind can be to move round

R-S: Lead and lead

I-T: Who else?

R-S: Read and read Madam.

I-T: Give me an explanation or change it.

R-S: Read to look at a piece of writing and the second read is the past tense of read.

R-S: Polish and polish Madam. Polish meaning to shine, and polish meaning from Poland.

F-T: Wonderful

R-S: wound and wound. Wound a break in skin and wound the past tense of wind.

F-T: Excellent

I-T: Can you all clap for yourselves? Heterophone is one of the terminologies studied under sense relations.

I-T: Can we take down notes so we can have something to take home?

R-S: Yes, madam.

I-T: Please be quiet. We are writing.

It may occur that the students initiate though it is very rare, and it happens when they want some clarifications about a question or questions asked by the teacher. Their initiations are mainly in the form of questions. In this excerpt, we have the IR (3), IRF (2), IRR (2) and IRRF (1). The IR occurs at a comparatively high rate of 37% while the IRF and IRR occur at rates of 25% each. The lowest is the IRRF with a low rate of 13%.

It was observed that the IR and IRF are the most recurrent sequences used in our study area. We observed that they both occurred in all the excerpts analysed above.

□ Patterns of Interaction:

- **IRF Pattern (4 instances, 25%):** The IRF sequence, where the teacher initiates, the students respond, and the teacher provides feedback, is evident in multiple exchanges.
 - **Example 1:**
 - **I:** "Now, can you give me an example of an heterophone?"
 - **R:** "Tear fluid from the eye and tear pull apart"
 - **F:** "Well done, clap for her."
 - **Example 2:**
 - **I:** "What does that mean?"
 - **R:** "Madam, wind is a moving body od air. And wind can be to move around"
 - **F:** "Wonderful"
- **IR Pattern (3 instances, 37%):** The IR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question and the student responds without feedback, is common.
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** "Who can give us more examples?"
 - **R:** "Building castles in the air"
- **IIR Pattern (1 instance, 12%):** The IIR pattern, where the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and another student responds, is less frequent.
 - **Example:**
 - **I:** "Give me an explanation or change it?"
 - **R:** "Read to look at a piece of writing and the second read is the past tense of read"
 - **R:** "Polish and polish Madam. Polish meaning to shine, and polish meaning from Poland"

□ Types of Feedback:

- **Approval:** For example, “Well done” and “Wonderful”
- **Clarification:** For example, “Can you give me an example of an heterophone?”
- **Encouragement:** For example, “well done, clap for her?”
- **Correction:** For example, “No!” is not used in this excerpt, but other forms of feedback are more prominent.

□ **Statistical Analysis:**

- The **IRF** pattern occurs at a rate of 25%, highlighting its role in the teacher's feedback process.
- The **IR** pattern, at 37%, indicates that the majority of interactions are simple question-response exchanges.
- The **IIR** pattern, at 12%, reflects less frequent follow-up questions from the teacher.
- The **IIRR** pattern, at 12%, shows occasional complex interactions with multiple student responses.

The results of the data demonstrates a predominance of the **IR** pattern, showing that simple question-response interactions are the most common form of discourse. The **IRF** pattern, though present, is used less frequently but still important for providing feedback. The lower frequencies of the **IIR** and **IIRR** patterns indicate less complex interaction in this lesson.

Overall, the study reveals that **IR** and **IRF** patterns are the most recurrent in the Cameroonian classroom context. This might be attributed to factors like large class sizes, the non-native English setting, and local conversational habits.

Series 1 refers to the number of occurrences and **series 2** shows the percentages.

In conclusion, the analyses of the excerpts above reveal that the **IR** is the most predominantly used pattern of interaction with a high rate of 58.92%, occurring 66 times in the entire data, followed by the **IRF** with a rate of 23.21% and an occurrence of 26, and **IIR** with a percentage rate of 6.25%

occurring just 7 times. While IIR occurring 4 times with a percentage of 3.57% and IF, IRRF and IIRF occurring at a relatively low rate of 2.67% each. A change in the IRF/IRE model as propounded by Sinclair and Coulthard (1972) in the Cameroonian context may be as a result of large class size, the non-native setting and the conversational habits of Cameroonians. Five patterns of interaction were observed during the analyses of the 5 classroom sessions observed. These patterns are IR (IIR and IIIR), IIRF/IIIRF, IRF, IRRF/IRRRF and IRR/IRR.

9. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the results of the present study, there were three major conclusions drawn based on the research questions. It was realised that five different patterns of interaction were observed within the classroom transaction. These patterns include IR (IRR and IIIR), IIRF(IIIRF), IRF, IRRF (IRRRF) and IRR (IRRR). It was found out that within the classroom transaction, the teacher gave contribution in the whole part of IRF. The teacher was predominantly the initiator in class and the giver of feedback. The students hardly initiate classroom discourse but predominantly respond to questions. Secondly, the present research reports that the IR sequence of classroom discourse structure occurred most predominantly with a percentage rate of 59%, followed by IRF scoring 23%, IIR 6%, IRR 3% and IF 3%.

According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Mehan (1979), a teacher usually uses questions to initiate the whole class or one single student. Then students respond to the question and the teacher follow up the responses with feedback. However, the present study found different discourse patterns with the previous research conducted by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Mehan (1979). Based on the findings, the study found out that classroom transactions are not only initiated by teachers but equally the students, though predominantly at a lower rate. The findings of the study corroborate Hong (2011) study which intimates that teachers' initiations were more compared to students' responses.

From the observation carried out, it was realised that most students had personal cultural factors that hinder their participation in classroom transaction. The students were silent at times in class due to certain reasons. Firstly, there those who did not know the answers to the teacher's questions, so they preferred to be silent. Some knew the answers but did not know how the will receive it. Others had expression difficulties and so rather stayed quiet. It was equally realised that the pedagogic environment affected classroom discourse. The class sizes were very large, no proper seating arrangement, lack of teaching-learning resources and the student-teacher ratio was alarming. The learning environment affects the classroom transaction as it forces the teacher to be the principal controller of classroom interaction and transaction.

In the classroom, initiation was done by both the teacher and the learners. In the context of teaching and learning, the teacher initiates the interaction based on the topic for the day's lesson and the communicative objectives to be achieved. The way the topic is introduced and demonstrated for further classroom discussion is what is referred to as initiation. The different types of initiation found in the data are: **nomination** (Most of the teachers often addressed the learners by their names to involve them in the task on hand. Addressing the learners by their names contributed a great deal to make them participate minutely in the discussions and activities), **direction** (teachers used directing to give a clear idea about the task to be performed, helped the learners to complete the task by following a chronological plan and to maintain the role of the facilitator and to retain the classroom etiquette) and **prompting** (Prompts were used by the teachers to ensure the learners complete the assigned task within the given timeframe. This was done to teach the learners to work

within the allotted timeframe of an activity and to understand their cognitive abilities by their level of accomplishment of a given task).

Response in classroom interaction, responses can come from both the teacher and the learner depending on the subject of discussion. The analysis revealed that responses from learners were typically shorter than the teachers' questions. Again, responses can be verbal or non-verbal form **nodding the head, giving of blank gaze, pointing with hand**. The last in the exchange structure is feedback (F), a turn which aims to give feedback to students' responses. The analysis showed that teachers had varied means of evaluating their lessons and giving feedback to the learners. Because, it grants the opportunity for both teacher and student to play their part as instantly as may be necessary, teachers are able to correct students' mistakes instantly.

10. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It was observed that many discourse patterns were employed during the various classroom transactions. The IR pattern was predominant though a variant of the IRF pattern. The IRF pattern to the exchange of information in the classroom has been criticised as being more about the learner saying what the teacher wants to hear than really communicating. Although this approach has been criticised, it can provide a useful framework for developing meaningful communication in a controlled form. This model is widely used in language teaching to structure classroom discourse, check understanding and guide learners towards correct language use. However, it is important to balance the model with more open-ended communicative activities that encourage spontaneous language use. For this reason, it is recommended to do further research in the challenges in implementing the IRF sequences in an ESL or EFL classroom setting. We notice from the results that the use of the IRF as a pedagogical tool helps students to take active part in classroom interactive discourse, for example, initiating, responding to, ending dialogues and giving feedback (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). Again, the IRF structure is the medium through which learning is realized as an object of pedagogical attention (Hall & Walsh, 2002). We also realize that the exchange enables teacher-learner or learner-learner interactions. As such, both the teacher and learner can inform, elicit, and evaluate in the structure, making it a non-teacher-dominated exchange (Sunderland, 2001). From these, it can be argued that using the IRF has the potential to contribute a great deal to second language pedagogy by highlighting the conditions for language acquisition. That is, to be an effective second language teacher, the teacher's way of introducing the language to his/her students should be content-based. This is considered to play a major role in the language learning system. As the results of this study have implications for future research, it is suggested that studies on the impact of the IRF may be conducted in the English language classrooms of other junior high schools in order to fully understand how it affects second language learning. Again, the role of learners may also be explored to help determine their exact contribution in the language learning process. Lastly, studies that make use of interview from learners may also be conducted in order to determine learners' understanding of the exchange structure. Finally, it is recommended that teachers need to create interactional atmosphere in the classroom to facilitate learners' learning. They also need to closely monitor the turn taking sessions to ensure fair participation of all learner.

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