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EFL Teacher Questions to Scaffold Learning Process: A Conversation Analytic Study

Baqer Yaqubi[1]
Fatemeh Mozaffari
University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Mazandaran, Iran.

Questioning practice constitutes one of the typical and fundamental interactional tools in L2 teaching. Much L2 research on teacher questions has been quantitative studies focusing on identifying question types and their roles in language acquisition and meaning negotiation. However, by drawing on conversation analysis within a sociocultural perspective, this study examines qualitatively how EFL teacher questions can scaffold learning processes. The data were collected through videotaping EFL classroom interaction. Eleven sessions of seven intermediate-level teachers in private language schools were recorded. Through the microanalysis of the transcribed data, the study found that EFL teachers vary in their structuring of unfolding question-answer sequences and that only a small number of teacher questions tended to provide learning opportunities. Four question types providing scaffolded assistance were identified: simplifying questions, marking questions, prompting questions and asking-for-agreement questions. This study contributes to understanding how the interactive nature of the questions teachers pose can shed light on the connection between teachers' practices and students' learning across unfolding sequence. It argues that teacher questions are more than elicitation techniques; they are mediational interactional tools to assist participation and comprehensibility. Some examples illustrating these communicative moves of questions and their scaffolding

[1] Corresponding Author. Email: Yaqubi@umz.ac.ir

functions are provided. The implications for teacher education are also discussed.
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Classroom discourse is typically dominated by question and answer routines in which teachers ask most of the questions, a practice constituting one of the principal ways in which they control the discourse and push learners to contribute to classroom interaction (Brock, 1986; Walsh, 2006). In the second language (L2) classroom, questions are powerful instructional tools for guiding the linguistic and cognitive development of English learners (Gibbons, 2003; Kim, 2010). While questions are ubiquitous in instructional contexts, developing effective questioning strategies is a challenging task for teachers. The investigation of teacher questions thus seems essential to understand their effect on language learners' thinking and language skills.

A considerable body of classroom-based studies has been undertaken into the nature of teacher questions. These studies have dealt with a variety of issues including question types or classifications (Bloom, 1956); questioning strategies (Cole & Cahn, 1987; Wu, 1993); students' L2 production (Lynch, 1996; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Seliger & Long, 1983); and students' thinking (van Zee & Minstrell, 1997). As with second language acquisition (SLA), much of the earlier L2 research has largely focused on identifying question types and creating taxonomies (Chaudron, 1988; Long & Sato, 1983; Thompson, 1997). More recently, drawing on input-oriented theories of SLA, questions have been investigated from the perspective of how they might promote the modification of interaction and negotiation of meaning (Gass, 1997; Long, 1983). While providing insight into the nature of questions, some of these studies have investigated talk primarily in discrete pieces and those which considered the context of interaction (Dalton-Puffer, 2006; Musumeci, 1996; Nunn, 1999; Wu, 1993), had a tendency to rely on some prior categorization. Therefore, their approach to data analysis has been etic (research centric) in nature, i.e., driven by the analyst's external interpretation of what an utterance accomplishes.

In contrast, other studies (e.g., Koshik, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Lee, 2006; Markee, 1995; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003) have taken an emic approach (participant centric) to the study of question-answer (QA) sequences. These studies situate themselves in the relatively recent line of scholarship, which investigates the way language learners and their interlocutors come to an understanding of the micro-interactional organization of their talk. In this line of scholarship, nonstructural aspects of language use or interactional practices such as turn-taking, repair, and sequential organization are treated as an integral part of the participants' language behaviour. As Markee (2005) has recently pointed out, focusing on the joint deployment of spoken practices can provide valuable insights about how second language interaction operates in real-time conversation. By focusing on the joint construction of talk, these studies and others seek to gain insight into how second language interaction unfolds in real time.

The study reported here adopts the second approach, i.e., the emic approach. It provides a fine-grained analysis of QA sequences in the EFL classroom interaction on the basis of sociocultural theory (SCT) and conversation analysis (CA) methodology. Within the framework of SCT (Donato, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985), learning is conceptualized as participation rather than acquisition and learning opportunities are viewed to be opportunities for engagement in the target language discourse. Given this notion of participation as learning, an important contribution that conversation analysis can make to the study of SLA is to detail the instructional practices that either create or inhibit the opportunities for participation (Lerner, 1995; Waring, 2008) and, by extension, the opportunities for learning. One such instructional practice concerns ways of attending to learners' contributions during oral interaction. QA sequences are a fundamental form of interaction. This study pays close attention to how EFL teachers structure their questions across unfolding sequence so that their questions could *scaffold* and assist learning.

Among various aspects of effective questioning, scaffolding is an important concept that helps us consider the context of language learning (Kim, 2010).

While there are numerous studies in literacy research on the role of scaffolding (Maloch, 2002; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2004; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), there is urgent need for more empirical research that demonstrates the interactive nature of scaffolding that leads to English learners' successful language learning in classroom contexts. The term scaffolding encompasses a wide range of effective instruction; however, we will frame *teacher questions as a scaffolding strategy* in the current study. Research literature on classroom discourse helps us understand the centrality of teacher questions in student learning (Cazden, 1988; Chaudron, 1988; Wong-Fillmore, 1982); many studies have examined questions as interactional products in classroom interaction (e.g., Lee, 2006; McCormick & Donato, 2000; Musumeci, 1996; Nunn, 1999; Shomoossi, 2004; Wu, 1993), but among them very few studies have directly investigated the scaffolded assistance of teacher questions (Kim, 2010; McCormick & Donato, 2000).

McCormick and Donato's (2000) study is a sociocultural case study in which the concept of scaffolding was used as a theoretical framework for investigating teacher questions. They sought to show how an ESL teacher's questions serve to scaffold learning during teacher-fronted activities and how these questions reflect the six specific functions of scaffolding categorized by Wood et al. (1976). However, they used already established categories of question functions. Without any prior categorization, this study thus expands on their findings by examining turn-by-turn how the act of questioning is accomplished in real-time interaction. To do this, the study drew on conversation analysis methodology. The few studies (Koshik, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Lee, 2006; Markee, 1995; Nystrand, et al., 2003) adopted CA methodology as a tool for microanalysis of QA sequences, have illustrated how the investigation of questions ought to take into account the sequential context in which the question is embedded.

opportunities for learner participation and comprehension. Therefore, these are discussed here.

Question-Answer Sequence

If classroom *questions* are to be considered as a linguistic form, then, they will not be taken as conversational or interactional objects, or social actions. The investigation of questions' sequential organization is critical in cases where structuring of questions in discourse shapes the research focus (Schegloff, 1984). Some studies that have analysed the structure of questions from an interactional perspective lend support to this view since they have illustrated how the investigation of questions ought to take into account the sequential context in which the question is more than just the relation of the 'question' with the subsequent 'answer' (Belhiah, 2011; Koshik, 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

Therefore, to obtain an understanding of the scaffolded assistance of questions, we need to look at the sequential organization of QA sequences, that is, how they are constructed and projected, as well as how they are oriented to by participants across unfolding sequence.

The Concept of Scaffolding

To investigate teacher questions as mediational tools in teacher-student interactions, this study relies on the concept of *scaffolding*. Theoretically, scaffolding originates from Vgotsky's SCT and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It has been introduced into the SLA literature by several researchers (Ellis, 1998; Hatch, 1992; Wood, et al., 1976). Scaffolded instruction supports students' development and provides a supportive structure to let them get beyond the level of what they can do (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999). Wood et al. (1976, p. 98) considered six main features for the process of scaffolding, "recruiting interest in the task; simplifying the task; maintaining pursuit of the goal; marking differences between what has been produced and the ideal solution; controlling frustrations during problem-solving; demonstrating an idealized version of the act to be performed."

According to McCormick and Donato (2000), "the original concept of scaffolding, as operationalized by Wood et al. (1976), has been simplified to represent, in a general sense, interlocutor collaboration, or graduated assistance" (p. 185). However, in the studies situated within a sociocultural framework and those focused on classroom interaction, scaffolding had better be examined across unfolding sequence. In other words, although not completely inaccurate, these simplified definitions of scaffolding (Donato, 1994; Wood, et al., 1976) often seem not to capture the various moves and functions of discourse, as verbal assistance unfolds during learning interactions across time.

Furthermore, underlying the concept itself is the metaphor of learning as participation which understands learning as the social processes of participation—one that contrasts sharply with the more common metaphor of learning as acquisition which is understood as accumulation of knowledge in the individual (Sfard, 1998). The participation metaphor offers complementary insights as the current SLA theory promotes the active use of the language as the best means of gaining communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Learners need varying degrees of support in their use of language or meaning-making; it is the responsibility of the teacher to shape and scaffold learning, to allow sufficient interactional space to ensure that learners are challenged while providing enough support to enable them to make themselves understood through having more participation in discourse.

To sum up, we aimed at examining scaffolding during interaction and we analysed questions in their sequences; to this end, we did not base our study on a prior categorization of scaffolded assistance of questions. With an "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1995), we tried to investigate teacher questions as they unfold within the sequence. And also we studied the relationship between teacher scaffolding and student involvement; how teachers sequence moves in QA sequences to scaffold learning opportunities. Through responses to teacher questions, learners have the ample chance to express themselves and contribute to interaction. Limitations of the metaphor of scaffolding have been identified in the literature and the debate continues concerning the usefulness of this construct (McCormick & Donato, 2000). In this study, we attempted to address this limitation by examining closely the use of questions by the teachers during the scaffolded sequences. Specifically, we examined how teacher questions scaffold class *participation* and *comprehension.*

Method

This study used a conversation analysis (CA) framework (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Psathas, 1995; Ten Have, 1999). The origins of current CA methodology stem from the interest in the function of language as a means for social interaction (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). The underlying perspective is that social contexts are not static but are constantly being formed by the participants through their use of language and the ways in which turn-taking, openings and closures, sequencing of acts, and so on are locally managed (Boyle, 2000). In CA, interaction is always an action sequence in which “a turn’s talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn’s talk, unless special techniques are used to locate some other talk to which it is directed” (Sacks, et al., 1974, p. 728). This can also be termed as the “next-turn proof procedure” (Sacks, et al., 1974, p. 729), which is the basic tool analysts can use to develop an emic perspective. In other words, the meaning of a turn-at-talk is determined by examining the ways that participants themselves construct an understanding of it, taking into account the sequential context in which the turn is embedded.

We used qualitative research design. As with other CA studies, we first collected spoken data through audio and video recordings, transcribed it, then started looking for patterns, segments, and embodied practices that seemed to offer the richest ground for investigation in relation to our research focus (Markee, 2000). The data for this study came from video recordings, drawn from EFL classroom lessons involving teachers and students who were Farsi-L1 speakers. Seven EFL intermediate-level teachers, from four private language schools in two cities in Iran, and their 54 students participated in the study, though the main participants were the teachers. They let us videotape one or two of their sessions, for a total of eleven 90-minute lessons, totaling approximately 17 hours, a reasonable sample size on which to draw conclusions in the light of evidence from previous studies (Seedhouse, 2004). We transcribed (see Appendix for transcript notations) all lessons in detail.

As with the procedure to analyse the data, first, all of the teachers' questions and QA sequences were identified. Then, some segments of the classroom discourse including some action sequences were candidated for microanalysis. Next, the actions in the sequences were characterized. We considered how the turn-taking organization and the sequential organization of talk provided understanding of the actions. Then, we analysed how QA sequences were structured by EFL teachers across unfolding sequence and how the questions were used by the teachers to scaffold learning; we focused on how the ways the actions were accomplished implicated certain identities, roles or relationships for the interactants in speech exchange system (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Finally, those sequences with the scaffolded assistance of questions were extracted for microanalysis.

Results

The first research question as a general question aimed at investigating the EFL teachers' structuring of QA sequences. The detailed analysis of the data showed that the participant teachers vary in their structuring of these sequences. Some of them tended to facilitate interaction and learning opportunities through providing enough wait-time and asking for elaborations. On the other hand, most of the teachers appeared not to have created enough learning opportunities through reduced wait-time, interrupting turns and the like. It should be stated that we did not further illuminate on how the teachers structured the unfolding QA sequences by providing specific examples because of the small scope of the study and also because the second research question as part of the first question was the major focus of the study.

The second research question aimed at examining the scaffolding assistance of teacher questions in the sequence. The data showed that the EFL teachers asked a total of 341 questions in 221 questioning exchanges. Of these exchanges, EFL learners were involved in only 82 (82 cooperative QA sequences). Some participant teachers did not attempt or need to scaffold learners in the sequences. When the teachers did engage the learners in a facilitative dialogue; their talk exhibited a range of scaffolding functions. However, due to the focus of the study, only scaffolding questions (not other types of scaffolding) were identified for the analysis. In the analysis, four types of scaffolded assistance of teacher questions emerged during interaction. However, the number of sequences constituting these types of scaffolded assistance was only 45 out of 82 cooperative QA sequences (and in turn out of 221 total QA sequences). However, a precise explanation for this finding is beyond the scope of this paper because the current study collected data in order to analyse the scaffolded assistance of teacher questions. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, what warrants the validity of the analysis is not the numerical data and frequency of instances, but whether adequate descriptions have been provided to explicate how X works in particular instances (Storch, 2002; Waring, 2008); therefore, no quantitative results are provided.

Episodes demonstrating how these questions with scaffolded assistance were realized are presented below with a microanalysis. The practice of providing a detailed account of single cases is a well-established tradition among CA researchers (Belhiah, 2011). Because face-to-face interaction is presumably conducted in an orderly and methodic manner, it is expected that every case that exemplifies a certain discursive practice will somehow conform to this social order. We present a turn-by-turn analysis of only four episodes (which were chosen at random from the discourse that four different teachers used) in reference to four scaffolded assistance. They are viewed as the quintessential exemplars of these assistance types. In the extracts, the teachers' scaffolded questions are bolded in their communicative moves.

Simplifying Questions

Throughout the data, it was found that when the learners could not solve a problem alone, some teachers used modified questions; they broke the task into parts and asked the learners one or more specific question(s), or focused on subparts of the question. This type of scaffolded question accounted for only 10 percent of all scaffolded questions in the data.

Extract 1. Context–The class is about to listen to a phone conversation in order to do an activity afterwards. The teacher reads an introduction to the listening from the textbook.

1 T: (reading)…they left a message.
2 L3: left a message? ((She does not understand the meaning of this phrase.))
3 T: what does it mean? Zahra?
4 L3: ((silence))
5 T: **what is "left" here? Is it a verb, adjective or noun?**
6 L3: verb
7 LL: /verb//verb/
8 T: **and Zahra what is it past of?**
9 L3: past of "leave".
10 T: **what does "leave" here mean?**
11 L3: ° give up? °
12 T: **relate its meaning to the meaning of the word after that "message''.**
"Leave a massage"?
13 L3: send
14 T: **Jeff was not in the office. They left a message to Jeff's assistant.**
"Leave" here means?
15 L3: put
16 T: aha, <u>put a message.</u>

When the teacher finishes her reading with the utterance "*they left a message*", one learner (L3) signals that she does not understand the phrase through repeating it, *"left a message?"* (line 2). This is indicated through rising intonation (marked by a question mark) at the end of L3's turn. In the subsequent turn, the teacher's question encounters L3's silence; this leads the teacher to take a new action, a communicative move indeed. From turn 5 to the end of the sequence, the teacher scaffolds the task of understanding the new vocabulary, in this case *"left a message"* by simplifying the task. She breaks the task into parts. She does this by testing with a series of display questions that L3 already knows (for a review on display question see e.g., Brock, 1986; Chaudron, 1988; Long & Sato, 1983).

The first subtask is for L3 to identify the part of speech of "*left*" (line 5). This question functions to reduce the degrees of freedom by allowing the student to focus on answering a simplified question. The second subtask is to identify the present form of this past tense verb (line 8). The third subtask is asking for the meaning of *"leave"* in this specific phrase (line 10). Upon L3's incorrect answer in the subsequent turn, *"give up"* (line 11), the teacher takes the next action. The teacher interprets every turn based on the previous turn (Sacks, et al., 1974). She scaffolds through affording the learner to relate the meaning of this verb to the object following it (lines 10–14). The teacher, then, returns to the original task of defining *"left"* in line 14. At last, L3 provides a correct definition, *"put"* (line 15) and the teacher repeats it in the next turn (line16) for the benefit of the class comprehension, *"aha, put a message"*.

First, these simplified questions (Mehan, 1979) illustrate that the teacher realizes the goal of comprehension. Second, they facilitate participation by making questions easier for students to answer. L3 has an opportunity to participate in the construction of the meaning of the vocabulary item because the teacher's use of questions with simplifying function provides her with manageable subtasks to perform. The completion of these subtasks contributes to the full solution of the task. In this way, we see how a question aimed at redefining and restructuring the problematic area for the learner provides a venue for the learner to participate in the social setting of the classroom and build new knowledge.

Although from an interactionist SLA perspective (Long, 1983; Pica, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985) this extract resembles common instances of negotiation of meaning, where one person provides interactional modifications to repair communication, a closer look at this example reveals its co-constructive nature. Previous investigations into teacher-student talk framed by sociocultural theory have primarily focused on building upon student responses to co-construct discipline knowledge (e.g., Gibbons, 2003; Jarvis & Robinson, 1997; McNeil, 2011). Therefore, the teacher's scaffolding talk is in response to L3; there is no predetermined script for her to follow. The teacher is therefore building upon the learner's contributions to the dialogue and providing types of other-regulation that precede self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). When teachers work to establish a communicative context with learners in the first stage of the ZPD, the distribution of talk is in favour of the teacher. Once the context is more firmly established, the teacher begins to aid comprehension of problems within the co-constructed context (McNeil, 2011).

Marking-Critical-Features Questions

Some teachers called the learners' attention to the important aspects of the task. When a learner was not working toward the preferred responses or the teacher's goals, the teacher called attention to text information, and semantic or linguistic features. This type of scaffolded question accounted for 25 percent of scaffolded questions in the data.

Extract 2. Context–The teacher has just finished reading a textbook utterance on tourism. She then engages the learners in discussion about the utterance.

1 T: ((she is reading)) "If you're worried about losing your passport, don't carry it
around with you, just keep it in your hotel room", ok what's your advice? Is it
ok? ((to L1)) Jack what's your idea? =

2 L1: = I have same idea I'd like to save it in a…this program and I don't carry my
passport or the valuable thing I have. =

3 T: **so what happen…what happens if you, so what if in a situation your passport is needed? =**
4 L1: = in the place my passport if needed (0.9) I will carry with my own. =
5 T: **= ok you don't know for example you put it in a hotel, so you go out, a police officer ask you about your passport, so what would you do? =**
6 L1: = for what? Ask me about the passport. =
7 T: [I don't know just to check] check that you are not a terrorist for example.
8 L1: =hm hm in this situation I go to jail. ((laughter))
9 T: =yes you can go to jail.

This teacher begins the interaction by asking learners' ideas regarding the utterance presented in the textbook. In the very first line, she nominates a learner named Jack (L1) to express his idea (The learners are Farsi-L1 speakers, but it seems that they have chosen English names for themselves in the English classroom). L1 provides a response in the next turn, *"I have same idea I'd like to save it in a…this program and I don't carry my passport or the valuable thing I have"*. The learner just states his agreement with the writer of that idea. In the next move (line3), the teacher calls L1's attention to one feature or aspect of the response by asking, *"so what happen what happens if you, so what if in a situation your passport is needed?"*. Whereas the teacher of the Extract: reduced the degrees of freedom by providing some subtasks (simplified questions) to respond, the teacher of this extract is taking the conceptual focus of the initial open question, *"what do you do in this situation?"*. The teacher looks to return to the scaffolding strategy of conceptually breaking down questions, but this time through marking critical features.

L1 responds, *"in the place my passport if needed (0.9) I will carry with my own"* (turn 4), however, it seems to the teacher that this learner is not working towards an acceptable response or the teacher's goal. Therefore, the teacher (turn 5) asks another assisting question that provides L1 with a line of reasoning that he can use to answer the previous question. L1 states, in his previous turn, that he does not carry his passport, the teacher, in reaction to this response, calls L1 to this aspect of the response that if a police officer enquires about his passport what he does? And in this way, the exchange is stretched until line 9 of the sequence.

The teacher's scaffolded questions in the sequence serve two functions: *direction maintenance*–motivating students to pursue the task and marking *critical features*–drawing students' attention to relevant areas of the problem or task (McCormick & Donato, 2000; Wood, et al., 1976). And upon answering to the teacher's follow-up questions (Duff, 2000; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) in the subsequent turns, the learner is forced to use the target language more to clarify his point. In fact, the teacher's scaffolding talk provides avenues for assisted language production. These questions first tend to give L1 more opportunity for participation and his own clarifications of the initial response and also facilitate L1 and class comprehension of the open question asked initially. By asking assisting questions, the teacher illustrates how teachers build bridges through talk that help learners participate and learn in whole-class exchanges. Extract 3 provides a richer example of how another teacher accomplishes this by integrating her talk with other semiotic tool or type of scaffolded question.

Asking-For-Agreement Questions

After hearing a learner's response, some teachers tried to create a space for conflicts of ideas via asking for agreement. This type of scaffolded question accounted for about 15 percent of all scaffolded questions founded in the data.

Extract 3. Context–This episode is extracted from a teacher's lesson in which the teacher is asking for learners' ideas about the value of some modern inventions.

1 T: inventions ((he is reading)): why do people use them often? Why do you think they have been successful?...why microwave oven? …What's your idea about that?

2 L4: it's good because hhmm food prepare, it's very fast prepare) (incorrect pronunciation)) Prepare very fast very…not very healthy but we cook if you are hurry . If you are hurry use the microwave oven and… successful for a...hot it *garmkardane ghaza* (heating food).=
3 T: =for heating food (0.3) ((to other students)) **agree?**
4 L3: if you use it microwave oven you don't need a lot of oil for cooking it.
5 L4: =yes
6 L5: [if scient…] ((L4 looks at L5 with a smile to let L5 to speak)) If scientists can prove it's not harmful its successful for us.
(The teacher is silent and does not take the floor)
7 L4: microwave use the *ashae* (ray) what's the meaning of *ashae* (ray)? =

The teacher begins with "microwave oven". He directs his question to the whole class with the expectation that all the students can potentially contribute. Thus, L4 initiates in the next turn by giving an open response to the teacher's open question. In her explanation, the student faces a problem in finding the right word. To deal with this problem, she adopts a communication strategy (language switch, to her Farsi-L1), "*garmkardane ghaza"*. Then, the teacher provides the right word *"for heating food"* and immediately asks for other learners' agreement with L4's response, *"agree?"*. This question makes other learners (L3 and L5) to offer their ideas for the referential question posed in turn 1 and also to provide more explanations for L4's initial response (turns 4, and 6). The teacher's nonverbal move after L6's turn is used to recruit learners into a more collaborative talk. This time, L4 takes the floor again to contribute to the discussion raised by the other two classmates, *"microwave use the ashae (ray) what's the meaning of ashae (ray)?"* (line7). The teacher's silence offers L4 another opportunity to add her ideas to the discussion; she begins to talk about the scientific aspect of microwave oven by referring to the term *"ray"* in her new utterance. The last turn of the sequence is in fact the beginning of a new interaction between L4 and the teacher.

In addition to the teacher's scaffolded question *(agree?)* in turn 2, aimed to keep learners on discussion, L4's classmates scaffold her performance by providing her with a subtopic of microwave oven, on its scientific aspect. In turn 7, L4 provides a response similar in topic to the ones employed by her classmates in turns 4 and 6. The use of the classmates' ideas and words during whole-class interaction is similarly reported in Jarvis and Robinson (1997) and McNeil (2011). Research also shows that classmates collectively pool their knowledge to create products during student-student interactions (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001). It is important to note that from a sociocultural perspective, borrowing classmates' ideas is an important stage in the process of internalization or movement from other-regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf, 2006; Ohta, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) underscored the importance of this behaviour noting that, "by using imitation, children are capable of doing more in collective activity" (as cited in McNeil, 2011, p. 7). Employing others' ideas can lead learners to generate new ideas of their own and in turn to progress from where they exert control over a task with the assistance of another, to where they become capable of independent strategic functioning. However, the precise study of the internalization is beyond the scope of the study.

In this extract, the sequence begins as a teacher-student interaction. Later, the teacher transforms it into a student-student interaction through asking for agreement. This asking for agreement as a scaffolded question places students in a face-to-face interaction without any intervention by the teacher. Therefore, while the teacher talk helps keep L4 in pursuit of the answer to his open question, L4's recruitment of other students' comments provides her scaffolding as well. This communicative move from the teacher also tends to promote comprehensibility regarding the topic under the discussion and it also increases other learners' initiation and contribution to interaction. In fact, the class learns more about the values of microwave oven through the teacher and the three learners' collaboration in the construction of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978) or interpretation of communication.

Prompting Questions

When the participant learners struggled to express themselves, many of the participant teachers requested for clarification or elicited elaborations. This type of scaffolded question accounted for about 50 percent of all scaffolded questions founded in the data.

Extract 4. Context–The class is working on a discussion exercise consisting of a series of open questions that aim at asking for learners' personal ideas and experiences.

1 T: Do you excel in many different things?
2 L9: =I'm not sure about this, reading others' mind. =
3 T: **=yes you can read other's mind well. What am I thinking? =**
4 L1: what about my think?
5 T: **yes, what does he think?** ((learners laughing))
6 L3: it's secret. ((laughter))
7 T: oh you can test it ((laughter))…she gets some money for that we could
pay her then she will say that. =
8 L9: =no just their hmhm… eye collected , it just for myself, don't read
about the others or participate. =
9 T: **=so, do you always read your husband's mind? =**
10 L9: =yes always=.
11 T: =so he never, he can never lie to you. =
12 L9: =no just say he to I... (0.5) I Know that you know…think about what
about I and I agree with about it. =
13 T: =thank you , maybe he is just giving you positive ideas and say: yes
You're right, yes you're right but maybe he is thinking about something else! ((teacher laughs, learners smile))=
14 L9: =he always laugh of …how I can to read his mind. =

15 T: oh my God. Thank you next one?

The teacher begins the extract with this question, *"Do you excel in many different fields?"*. He does not select the respondent; instead, he lets the learners initiate. The current speaker (the teacher) does not select the next speaker and does not continue talking with another turn constructional unit; therefore, any speaker may self-select at this point (Sacks, et al., 1974). Thus, L9 volunteers to respond, *"I'm not sure about this, reading others mind."* This subtopic raised by L9, seems to be an interesting topic for both the teacher and other learners. L9's initiation is followed by the teacher's acknowledgement, *"you can read other's mind well"* and also his follow-up question, *"what am I thinking?"* (line 3). The teacher's playfulness here, *"what am I thinking?"* leads other learners to initiate and contribute to the discourse (L1 in turn 4 and L3 in turn 6). This playfulness is repeated by the teacher in later turns, as a prompt, either in follow-up questions (lines 5, 9) or follow-up statements (lines 7, 11, 13) which make L9 to develop her subtopic. For example, subsequent to L9's turn (line 8), the teacher prompts with a follow-up question, *"so, do you always read your husband's mind?"* (line 9). Further, upon L9's short response, the teacher prompts this time with a follow-up statement, *"so he never, he can never lie to you."* (turn 11). L9 provides a response but suddenly pauses, however, the teacher does not hold the floor and his nonverbal pause is signaling to L9 that he is inviting her to engage in this statement with him.

Extending wait-times to recruit student participation was similarly used by a teacher in Anton (1999) and McNeil (2011). Providing extended wait-time for students to respond is also a scaffolding technique exhibited in peer-to-peer collaboration (Ohta, 2001). In this extract, these kinds of prompts seem to drive discourse forward (lines 10–15) by generating other aspects of the topic for new discussion. This scaffolded assistance of teacher question is treated or interpreted in the sequential development of talk; this treatment is the focus of conversation analytic studies.

In the above extract, the teacher tries to make learners elaborate on their initial responses and further probe their understandings by asking additional open questions which are called *prompts* (Dalton-Puffer, 2006; Mehan, 1979; Wu, 1993). Under the sociocultural perspective, in the interaction with the teacher as a more knowledgeable person, the learner can learn from the scaffolding that the teacher creates for the learner (Donato, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). The teacher' prompts make the respondent learner produce the target language more. Applying the sociocultural perspective, teacher questions are not just asked to get information; instead, they have a social cognitive value of scaffolding (McCormick & Donato, 2000). The teacher uses questions, especially follow-up questions, to invite students to participate more and express their ideas more clearly in a way that is comprehensive to the whole class. Through prompts, following the learner' responses, the teacher succeeds to assist the learner to solve a problem which she cannot solve alone; it seems she cannot extend her speech beyond the initial remark.

Discussion

This article has tried to demonstrate how QA sequences are a crucial device in conducting language classroom interaction. Our analysis showed clearly that the teacher, although not the sole contributor to learning improvement, was a critical player in these sequences.

The first research question aimed at investigating EFL teachers' structuring of QA sequences. The participant teachers structured QA sequences differently and thus, produced different levels of opportunities (Walsh, 2006; Wu, 1993). However, the major focus of the study was finding an answer for the second research question. The study findings indicate that only a small number of the participant teachers' questions tended to scaffold learner participation. However, the single-case analyses demonstrate the effective ness of these types of questions and how EFL teachers can manage the sequential development of QA sequences by guiding their respondent learner(s), through scaffolding participation and comprehension. They can manage to accomplish this artfully by structuring their QA sequences in a way that their initial and follow-up questions provide learners with enough interactional space. They can use several communicative moves in the form of questions to achieve these purposes.

First, through simplified questions, teachers can scaffold learners' comprehension and production. For example, in understanding a vocabulary item, one participant teacher relied on a learner's previous knowledge within her ZPD (see Extract 1). Mercer and Littleton (2007) argued that, "teachers have to start from where the students are, to use what students already know and help them go back and forth across the bridge between everyday and educated ways of thinking" (as cited in McNeil, 2011, p. 6). Wood et al. (1976) also highlighted the ability of teachers to limit the task demands so that learners' completion of the subtasks leads to the full solution of the task. However, similar to McCormick and Donato (2000) and Mehan (1979), this study tried to demonstrate the scaffolding assistance of simplifying questions during the unfolding sequence.

Second, when learners' responses are not acceptable enough, teachers can call learners' attention to critical aspects of the task through follow-up questions (see Extract 2). This finding has resonance with McNeil (2011) and McCormick and Donato (2000). *Third*, when students struggle to express themselves, teacher questions serve to increase the comprehensibility of their utterances through prompting (Wood, et al., 1976) (see Extract 4). There is an awareness demonstrated in the extracts of the value of not accepting a learner's first contribution and of the need to draw out what has been said. And *finally*, when teachers ask for agreement by other learners rather than giving their own ideas on the current response, they let students speak (see Extract 3). This also creates a favourite space for student-student interaction. Analysing the sequential organization of display questions, Mehan (1979) also found the teacher may employ any one of the strategies (e.g. prompting replies, repeating elicitations, and simplifying elicitations) until the expected reply does appear.

These questions promote a change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning, allowing students to gain benefit from sharing "ownership" (Kim, 2010, p. 110) of content and construction of new knowledge. The teachers selectively choose questions to build participation and to keep discussions alive. In this way, they manage to connect that act of questioning with the shared understanding and co-construction of meaning (Lantolf, 2000; Swain, 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) which in turn is woven into the pedagogical aim of classroom interaction. By the same token, teacher questions are understood by students not as queries for which they should provide an answer, rather as requests for more participation and shared comprehensibility. This can be indicative of teachers' 'Communicative Interactional Competence' (Markee, 2000; Walsh, 2006). Helping learners to say what they mean and shaping and fine-tuning their contribution are important interactional skills, occurring most frequently in the feedback move or the third-turn position (Lee, 2007; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). In this way, both participants (teacher and learner) display a keen understanding of the sequential organization surrounding their talk, and a shared orientation to the ongoing task as being principally remedial in nature in that the student's turns will be attended to as bids for assistance.

With these communicative moves, the social and cognitive value of questions becomes apparent. Questions are more than elicitation techniques but as tools for shared cognitive functioning in the social context of classroom interaction (McCormick & Donato, 2000) and as dynamic interactional tools to build collaboration and to scaffold comprehensibility (Donato, 1994; McCormick & Donato, 2000; Swain, 2000). Rather than simply assigning a static function to a question type (e.g., display or referential question, open or closed question, or-choice question and the like), the study findings have shown that a more valid understanding of a teacher's question can be achieved by analyzing it within the framework of scaffolding, the context of discourse and in reference to sequential organization of talk and turn-taking system. This approach is consistent with conversation analysis methodology and sociocultural theory emphasizing that learning is a collaborative achievement. Questions are one semiotic tool that teachers can use for scaffolding L2 learning. Therefore, the findings from this study support and contribute to questioning, scaffolding, sociocultural, and conversation analysis literature.

We have discussed questioning literature. As with scaffolding literature, van Lier (1996) argued that, “this local or interactional scaffolding may well be the driving force behind good pedagogy, the hallmark of a good teacher” (p. 199). In this study, likewise, teachers’ scaffolding has been suggested as a possible solution to succeed in engaging learners in classroom. Teachers’ scaffolding affects the way they interact with their students (Gillies & Boyle, 2005). However, in this context, scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy needs to be appropriately implemented. Through various questioning moves–four scaffolded questions found by the study–teachers can improve their interaction with learners.

By adopting a sociocultural lens, it is possible to view the effects that socially constructed teacher talk serves for student performance. The data show how teachers responsively adapted discourse moves in order to create dialogic spaces for their students to operate. Engaging students in collaborative thinking within the ZPD empowered them to participate linguistically in mainstream classroom practices and exercise their voice.

This study contributes to the sociocultural literature in two additional ways. First, it underscores the importance of discourse moves (e.g., extended wait-time, asking simplified questions or follow-up questions) that assist language learners in interaction. Previous investigations into teacher-student talk framed by sociocultural theory have primarily focused on various forms of scaffolding (Gibbons, 2003; McNeil, 2011; Walsh, 2006), with a very few focused on questioning discourse moves (McCormick & Donato, 2000). This study contributes to the latter group. And second, from a sociocultural perspective responding to questions with the help of others is a clear indicator that language is being learned, since it provides a social plane that enables learners to use language that they will later internalize (Lantolf, 2006).

From a methodological perspective, this study provides some insights into the benefits that can be derived from adopting an emic approach to the study of verbal behaviour in L2 interactions. It provides ample evidence to suggest that the amount of information that could be gained through CA transcription and analysis is beneficial for understanding the role of interaction including QA sequences in L2 learning (Markee, 2000).

Conclusion and Implications

With respect to practical issues related to learning and teaching, we described the complex ways in which the actions of teachers in their interactions with students can influence the learning opportunities that occur. As we have noted, we found that one aspect that is very much in the hands of the teacher is that of orchestrating the question-answer sequence in ways that have the potential to help learners' participation and comprehension. We argued that questioning involves more than the initiation-response-feedback exchange commonly attributed to teachers (Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Waring, 2009) but also includes a wider repertoire of communicative moves that are often designed to encourage learners to make their understandings and reasoning more explicit in order to contribute to the scaffolding behaviours and cooperative learning development of their own and others' learning (Gillies & Boyle, 2005).

Previous studies examining teacher questions and interaction from both interactionist SLA and sociocultural theories have overlooked teacher question as a scaffolding tool to assist language learners struggling to talk. Investigating teacher questions within a scaffolding framework, the current study has provided insight into the nature of teachers' questioning. In this study, teacher questions scaffolded goals of learners' participation and comprehension. Investigating question functions in this way moves beyond the literature on question types and taxonomies and enables us to better understand how questions operate as semiotic tools for achieving learning opportunities within the context of teacher-student classroom interaction. The examples of teacher-student dialogues presented in this paper illustrate the varied ways question can be used to help language learners participate in talk.

Although this study is limited by the duration of observation, the findings have implications for research into scaffolding and questioning in particular, with respect to student participation, and implications for the teacher education, that they can play an important role in how much learners participate and comprehend in discourse, and also the need for teacher educators to introduce to teachers a broader range of scaffolding talk than is currently recommended in the literature. Professional development activities discussed in the literature focused on facilitating questioning and interactional abilities either do not address the necessity for scaffolded questions (e.g., Brock, 1986), or focus on scaffolding only in terms of elaborating, reformulating, or repeating student responses (e.g., Walsh, 2006). The results of this study suggest that classroom teachers need the abilities to draw upon verbal questioning moves as one of the possible ways to scaffold language learners.

Future studies should explore in more detail additional EFL classrooms in other contexts to discover extra scaffolded assistance of questions. Future research should also consider other language proficiency levels. Furthermore, research can be done to train EFL teachers to be interpreters or analysts of their own classroom interaction (Walsh, 2006).

The Authors

Baqer Yaqubi is Assistant Professor at University of Mazandaran.His research interests include intelanguage pragmatics, oral second language pedagogy, and CA for SLA.

Fatemeh Mozaffari is an MA holder of TEFL at University of Mazandaran. Her research interests include classroom interaction, teacher talk, questioning and CA for SLA.

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Appendix

Transcript Notations

The transcription symbols used here were developed by Schegloff (2007).

T: teacher

L1: learner (identified as learner 1)

L: unidentified learner

LL: several learners simultaneously

(.) a short untimed pause

… a pause of about one second

(2.0) timed silence

[ ] overlapping utterances

foo- an abrupt cut-off of the prior word

<u>**stock**</u> **holder** speaker emphasis

. falling intonation

↑ rising intonation

, continuing intonation

yea::r prolonging of sound

WORD loud speech

°word° quiet speech

↑word raised pitch

↓word lowered pitch

>word< quicker speech

<word> slowed speech

= latch

( ) inaudible talk

(word) transcriptionist doubt

(close eyes) translation of L1

((gazes)) nonspeech activity or transcriptionist comment

Present shift to L1

WB whiteboard

گفتگوکاویِ نحوه پرسش معلمانِ زبان انگلیسی و بسترسازی فضای یادگیری در تعاملات کلاسی

باقر یعقوبی
فاطمه مظفری
دانشگاه مازندران

پژوهش های انجام شده در زمینه نحوه پرسش معلمان در تعاملات کلاسی،عمدتاً کمی و معطوف به شناسایی انواع پرسش ها و نقش آنها درمرتفع ساختن ابهامات مفهومی در یادگیری بوده است. پژوهش حاضر با بهره گیری از تئوری اجتماعی- فرهنگی ویگوتسکی و دیدگاه گفتگوکاوی، به بررسی کیفی رابطه ممکن بین پرسشهای معلمان زبان انگلیسی وایجاد وبستر سازی فضای یادگیری می پردازد. جهت جمع آوری داده ها، میانکنش های یازده کلاس (هفت معلم) ضبط و تصویربرداری شد؛ سپس تعاملات ضبط شده به صورت نوشتاری تهیه گردید.تحلیل نوبت به نوبت تعاملات نشان داده است که صرفا تعداد اندکی از پرسشهای معلمان فرصت های مشارکت و فضای یادگیری موثری را برای زبان آموزان ایجادمی کنند. علاوه بر این، چهار نوع پرسش موثرشناسایی شد: پرسشهایی که پاسخگویی را آسان تر می کنند، پرسشهایی که ابعاد اساسی بحث را برجسته می کنند، پرسشهایی که نظر سایر زبان آموزان را می پرسند وپرسشهای متوالی که تعامل را ادامه می دهند. مشاهدات و تحلیل ها نشان می دهد که پرسشهای معلمان تنها برای یافتن پاسخ از سوی زبان آموزان نیست بلکه آنها ابزارهای تعاملی مناسبی در جهت درک و مشارکت بیشتر زبان آموزان درتعاملات کلاسی هستند.

کلید واژه ها: تعاملات کلاسی؛ پرسشهای معلمان؛ فرصت مشارکت و یادگیری؛ بستر سازی فضای یادگیری؛ گفتگوکاوی