

Teachers' Implementation of CAT in Iraqi EFL Classes



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Abstract:

This study aims at investigating how Iraqi EFL teachers employ the communication accommodation strategies to develop interaction in EFL classes. observation was used as data collection method and by attending five lectures for five teachers with different specialization and experience at University of Mosul/College of Education for Humanities/ department of English. The results show that accommodation occurs in Iraqi EFL classes and the different accommodation strategies such as interpretability, approximation, discourse management, interpersonal control and emotional expression vary in their implementation. In addition, some factors such as the topic discussed, teacher specialization, looping and the relation between the teacher and his students have a crucial impact on the selection of one strategy over another. Finally code-switching was recorded as additional strategy to develop in-class interaction.

Keywords: Interpretability, Approximation, Interpersonal Control

1. Introduction:

After World War I, there has been a great demand all over the world on learning English, Iraqi schools are no exception. Therefore, teaching English as a foreign or second language has gained a great deal of importance. Iraqi EFL learners may have the ability to read and write in English, but they struggle to interact fluently. As a foreign language, learning English is restricted to formal settings in Iraq. Therefore, it is of crucial significance for Iraqi teachers to compensate for this lack of exposure using different strategies to accommodate in-class interaction.

2. Statement of the Problem:

In spite of the fact that Iraqi EFL learners study English for almost all their academic years, they lack the competency to initiate and maintain in-class interaction. A huge body of researches has shown that teacher-student interaction has a significant effect on EFL classes (Long, 1983), (Swain, 2005), (Ellis, 2008), yet, a few concentrated on what actually happens inside these classes.

3. Aim of the Research:

This research aims to investigate teachers' use of CAT to develop real interaction in Iraqi EFL classroom. It specifically attempts to explain how teachers apply the accommodation strategies to accommodate their students during in-class interaction to encourage student's participation and to avoid communication breakdown in EFL class. This study tries to

answer the following questions:

- What are the strategies used by Iraqi teachers encountering difficulties in EFL classes?
- Which strategies are frequently used in EFL classroom?

4. Hypothesis:

It is hypothesized that interpretability strategy is the most frequent used in Iraqi EFL classes.

5. Interaction in EFL Classes:

Ellis (2008) states that learners can develop their skills in any language by learning and acquisition. Within the process of learning any language, the acquisition of a foreign language is achieved by formal environment or natural setting. Researchers in language acquisition suggested that there are many factors that influence the competence and performance of language learners such as linguistic input, linguistic output, and linguistic environment (Leslie and Howard, 1984), (Swain, 2005), (Ellis, 2008). Mackey (1999) claims that teachers must establish an interactive learning environment in the language classroom. This type of environment encourage fruitful negotiation in the target language. So, interaction has a main role in language learning within classes. Interaction is defined by Ellis (1990) as any communication that take place during exchanges of real information or within formal drilling. Ninio and Snow (1996) claim that successful learning or acquisition of any language occurs when there is a participation in language communication by learners in their classrooms. Organizing activities that promote active interaction among language learners and establishing a conducive educational environment is the main role of teachers where the focus of these activities is on negotiation and sharing information (Jin et al., 2005). In the same vein, Rivers (1987) proposed that two-way interaction has an impact on expanding effective communicative classes where learners' cooperation and participation are prioritized by their teachers.

Class discussion is one of the building blocks of CLT (communicative language teaching). Where teachers' role is to

facilitate language instead of being a mere knowledge transmitter. Within the theory of Communicative Language Teaching, there is lack of proficiency in stems of language for learners as a result of the teaching strategies employed (Widdowson, 1972). Littlewood (2014) proposed that teachers should modify their tasks in classes of language learning by concentrating on different teaching strategies to develop active interaction for students which in turn increase students' communicative competence, including grammatical understanding.

6. Previous Studies on CAT:

Pamela (2010) investigated speech accommodation by analyzing international business meetings discourse which involve native and non-native participants. The study detects that participants use convergence and normalization strategies to develop communication during the meetings. Likely, Wan and Rafik-Galea (2015) explored the various speech accommodation strategies used in selling life insurance by analyzing conversations at sales meetings. The study showed that both bilingual sellers and prospective life insurance buyers use many accommodation strategies when they want to confirm or decline a sale.

When dealing interaction in media, Buzzanell et al. (1996) investigated speech accommodation on telephone answering machine messages which finds out that individuals, especially callers, converge occasionally and unconsciously to mediated communication. In a study by Bunz et al. (2004), the focus was on individuals' tendency to adjust their politeness levels in electronic email. The findings show that recipients are more likely to respond politely to messages that include polite verbal cues or structural clues.

Another study by Elena-Madalina (2010) explored the various forms of presupposing social identity in online or virtual communities. This research highlighted the dependence on labels and attributions for establishing social identity. The analysis of online data proved that convergence can be noticed as individuals exhibited respect toward various identities and perspectives.

Overall, these studies indicate that in various forms of mediated communication, individuals tend to adapt their behavior and language to the context and specific cues present. Whether it is through telephone messages, email interactions, or online communities, individuals demonstrate a natural inclination toward convergence in their communication patterns

The application of CAT was also utilized to examine relation between regular individuals and law enforcement officials. Relatedly, Christopher et al. (2008) study the impact of communication accommodation in interactions between police officers and civilians in China and America. The research findings demonstrated a clear positive correspondence between police officers' accommodative behavior and civilian reliance in the police, as well as compliance with police requests. In another study, Howard Giles et al. (2012) focused on analyzing video recordings of 69 traffic stops involving white officers and white (non-Latino) or Latino drivers. The analysis showed that officers tended to accommodate white drivers or those with less noticeable accents more than Latinos or those with heavier accents. It was also noted that officers accommodated less, and even failed to accommodate at all, during extensive policing situations. Additionally, the study concluded that officers were more likely to accommodate individuals who displayed a higher level of accommodative behavior themselves.

In the case of familial interaction, the behaviors of communication accommodation have a significant impact on people's daily lives.

The relation of monoracial mother and multiracial daughter investigated by Mahanita (2013) the results of the study uncovered several strategies utilized by the daughter to accommodate her mother. Daughters reveal the strong bond within the family through comprehensibility, approximation, positive interpersonal control and discourse management strategies. Similarly, the relation between step-parent and step-child investigated by analyzing an online survey that involves 133step-children, it was inferred that a higher level of accommodation between step-parents and step-children correlated positively with conversation satisfaction, relational closeness, family identity, and even step-family satisfaction.

Since the emergence of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in the 1970s, researchers have applied it to the study of interaction in various fields such as business, healthcare, media communication, family interaction, and law enforcement. These studies have assessed different modes of communication including face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations, internet communication, and other forms of media. However, there has been a limited amount of research that focused on the application of CAT in language teaching and learning.

Among the few studies that have explored this area, Manju (2005) studies the effectiveness of communication accommodation in English teaching. The results revealed that teachers utilized convergence strategies, such as adjusting their discourse, to gain learners' appreciation and facilitate effective interaction. Additionally, the results show that teachers employ divergence strategies to maintain a positive social identification.

In another study by Yi-Rung and Wenli (2015), the scholars examined teachers' implementation of accommodation strategies in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and identified the influencing factors. The data analysis identified six accommodation strategies were revealed as a result of data analysis such as: defining, introducing, listing, illustrating, eliciting, and emphasizing.

Overall, while CAT has been extensively practiced in various contexts, further researches exploring its potential in language teaching and learning are required.

In the specialization of healthcare, (CAT) is also utilized to examine the dynamics between healthcare professionals and patients, including nurses and patients, pharmacists and patients, and doctors and patients. For instance, a study conducted by Watson and Gallois (1998) delved into the communication patterns between nurses and patients. The findings of the study uncovered that healthcare professionals employ various discourse management techniques and emotional expressions to accommodate patients during interpersonal interactions. In another study by Gallois et al. (2015) focused on the interpretability of doctors' medical

records by investigating instances of under-accommodation. The results demonstrated that patients' lack of understanding was a direct consequence of doctors' failure to appropriately accommodate their needs. Additionally, Erwin et al. (2015) investigated interaction between pharmacist and patient and identified different accommodation strategies including discourse management, interpersonal control, approximation, and interpretability where these strategies utilized by patients and pharmacists.

7. Communication Accommodation Theory:

CAT (Communication Accommodation Theory) is an interpersonal communication theory that developed from SAT (Speech Accommodation Theory) which introduced for the first time by Howard Giles in 1973. Giles proposed that individuals' adjustment of their verbal or non-verbal behaviors to accommodate each other occurs either consciously or unconsciously. This adjustment serves three main objectives: 1) gaining social appreciation; 2) Enhancing communicative effectiveness; 3) Maintaining social identity (Beebe and Giles, 1984), (Giles et al., 1991).

Within CAT, convergence and divergence are the core strategies in interpersonal communication (Giles et al., 1991), (Giles, 2007). When individuals adapt their verbal or non-verbal communicative behavior to show similarity to their interlocutors, gain approval or appreciation from their listeners, and facilitate conversation this strategy is known as "Convergence" (Giles, 2007). Convergence encompasses various aspects, including adjustments in pronunciation, word choice, sentence structure, speech rate, pauses, explanations, repetitions, praise, and even language switching.

8. Methodology and Procedure:

The participants were five English teachers at the University of Mosul/ College of Education for Humanities/ Department of English, there is a variety in ages, experience, and specialization. A checklist was constructed by the researcher, it involves accommodation strategies such as interpretability, approximation discourse management, interpersonal control and emotional expression. In addition, the sub strategies of

each main strategy is included within the checklist.

To investigate the teachers' use of CAT for developing real interaction in Iraqi EFL classes the researcher follows certain procedures: After the teachers giving permission, the researcher attends a lecture for each one of the five teachers using the constructed checklist to record the employed strategies. Different topics are discussed during these lectures and each teacher focuses on some strategies rather than the others. The representation of each strategy is accomplished in percentages based on the extent to which sub-strategies are used. The table below shows the distribution of the different accommodation strategies used by each teacher.

Table 1. The Representation of The Strategies used by Each Teacher

Lectures sorted by teachers	Teacher experience by years	Teacher specialization	Topic discussed	Accommodation strategies				Additional strategy
				approximation	Interpretability	Discourse management	Emotional expression	
Teacher 1	20	Literature	Characteristics of the absurd theater	100%	100%	72%	0	No
Teacher 2	18	Applied linguistics	Foreign and second language strategies	60%	50%	50%	100%	Code s.

Teacher 3	8	Literature	Short story	70%	100%	45%	100%	0	No	Code s.
Teacher 4	7	Linguistics Phonetics and phonology	Grammar	100%	100%	55%	0	0	No	Code s.
Teacher 5	6	Linguistics	Linguistics	70%	70%	90%	100%	80%	Code s.	Code s.

9. Results and Discussion

As for teacher 1, the results show that interpretability and the approximation strategies were used fully, discourse management strategy was used with (72%), and interpersonal and emotional expression strategies were not used. Mohammed (2007) states that one benefit of teaching literature is language enrichment and since approximation strategy is employed when the aim is the productive language and communication while the interpretability strategy is employed when the focus is students' ability to comprehend. This is the reason behind using these two strategies fully. Discourse management strategy was not developed fully in this lecture as the teacher concentrated on some sub-strategies within this strategy such as repetition, topic control, delay, asking referential question, feedback, and delay. Finally, using non-verbal signals and body language were used extensively in this lecture as they help the teacher to manage his classroom easily.

When discussing the results of teacher 2, the results show that approximation strategy was employed with (60%), interpretability was employed with (50%), discourse management with (50%) while emotional expression strategy was fully employed and the teacher extensively employed the code switching because it helps to clarify misunderstanding. It

is easy to express some concepts in one of the languages (native language), creating a communicative effect, and building group solidarity (Mattsson, 1999). It seems that code switching acts both ways, it supports interpretability strategy as it is used to clarify misunderstanding. On the other hand, it builds rapport between the teacher and the students so it supports the emotional expression strategy. It is clear that this teacher who is specialized in applied linguistics has succeeded in employing different accommodation strategies to develop interaction in his class.

As for teacher 3, the results show that the approximation strategy was employed with (70%), interpretability strategy was used with (100%), discourse management was employed with (45%), emotional expression was used with (100%) and no use for interpersonal control strategy. Interpretability and emotional expression strategies were used fully in this lecture as the former strategy aids to achieve comprehension while the latter is used when the teacher focuses on his students' feelings to convey reassurance and comfort. Emotional expressions or emotional experience play an important role in the entire educational process as pleasant experiences foster learning process while unpleasant experiences have a negative outcome on students' motivation, memory or creativity (Fredrickson, 2004), (Lamovec, 1991). So, employing this strategy correctly has an impact on students' interaction and develops communication.

When discussing the results of Teacher 4, the results show that this teacher has employed the approximation strategy with (100%), interpretability strategy with (100%), discourse management strategy with (55%) and there is no use for emotional expressions and interpersonal control strategies. Approximation strategy includes speech rate and tone. To speak at the appropriate rate enables others to understand and follow your message. The appropriate use of intonation adds clarity and meaning to words. In this lecture, the teacher who is specialized in phonetics and phonology employs this strategy very well. In addition this strategy is used when the focus is on students' productive language.

When discussing the results of teacher 5, the results show that approximation strategy was used with (50%) interpretability

strategy was fully employed with (100%), discourse management strategy was employed with (60%), emotional expression strategy was fully used with (100%), interpersonal control strategy was used with (80%) and code switching is employed as additional strategy by the teacher. In this lecture it seems that the teacher employed the interpersonal control strategy which was absent in the previous lectures. This strategy refers to any interaction that involves verbal or non-verbal such as the use of body language in addition to para-verbal which is the use of tone and intonation. It occurs inside classes among teachers and their students and it has many purposes such as performing academic tasks, maintaining relationship and conveying meaning (Tranca and Neagoe, 2018). This strategy includes care, clarity, humor, and praise. Putting learners at ease as a result of their teacher's Care, this will motivate them to speak without hesitation or fear of being wrong. Using this strategy will promote motivation, interest, and willingness to engage in speaking and listening activities. The implementation of this strategy in Iraqi EFL classes needs an experienced teacher because this strategy cuts both ways. It has positive effects such as building rapport between the teacher and his students, motivate students' participation, and develop class interaction; on the contrary, abusing this strategy can lead to negative consequences such as lack of mutual respect and losing control over the class which explains why some teachers ignored the use of this strategy. In addition, looping has a significant effect on this strategy which is having the same teacher for more than one year.

Out of the above discussion, accommodation occurs in all the five classes where teachers employ the five main accommodation strategy to varying degrees to achieve convergence. This is confirmed by Özlem (2015) who states that accommodation occurs in all types of interaction more or less. The different accommodation strategies varies in their implementation by the five teachers, some strategies were employed fully while others were employed partially. The interpretability strategy was fully used by the five teachers, so it is the most frequent used. Two teachers use code switching as additional strategy to develop class-interaction. Some strategies are linked with specific topics others are linked with teacher's specialization. Two accommodation strategies were absent to some extent such as emotional expressions and

interpersonal control strategies. So these two strategies need to be concentrated on as they work hand in hand with the other strategies.

10. Conclusion:

The study concludes that there is a close connection between teaching and accommodation strategies which occur in EFL classes. The five accommodation strategies such as interpretability, approximation discourse management, interpersonal control and emotional expression strategy occur to varying extent in Iraqi EFL classes. Because of its importance, the interpretability strategy was fully employed while others such as approximation and discourse management strategies were employed partially. Other strategies such as emotional expressions and interpersonal control strategy were less employed. The use of the different accommodation strategy is governed by some factors such as the topic discussed, teacher specialization, looping and the relation between the teacher and his students. Finally code-switching was recorded as additional strategy to develop in-class interaction.

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