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Editor-in-chief

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A Study of the occurrence and Initiation of Verbal Interaction in EFL Online Classes at University Level

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*Hussein Ali Ahmed ***

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Abstract

Foreign language classes are usually activated by means of a variety of strategies and techniques that both teachers and students bring in or contribute to so as to bring about more effective learning and create more involvement in the ongoing activities. Interaction, through its multi-directional forms, plays a focal role in triggering students' interest and motivates them to participate in the learning process. Verbal interaction refers to teachers addressing of students or vice versa or students addressing each other. It has a long history as a topic of study and research in the traditional educational system represented by teacher-student meeting face to face within a classroom setting. Interaction in online classes has been recently heeded due to the outbreak of covid-19 which made almost all the educational institutions worldwide shut down and change to online classes. As such, the current research aims at studying and investigating verbal interaction in English as a foreign language classes at university level in terms of its occurrence and initiation, i.e. the party, i.e. teacher or students, who starts verbal interaction. The study hypothesizes that (1) In EFL online classes, verbal interaction does not occur as required and (2) Verbal interaction in EFL online classes is mostly teacher initiated. To validate the preceding hypotheses and bring about the set aims, 90 online sessions (45 linguistics and 45 literature with a minimum duration of 40-45 minutes of each session, were attended and observed by the researchers. The data were collected by means of a checklist prepared by the researcher. On analyzing the collected data, it was

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found out that verbal interaction takes place with a reasonable frequency in online classes, linguistics and literature, and that they were mostly initiated by the teacher. In the light of these findings, it has been recommended that due to the educational and pedagogical importance of verbal interaction, teachers should try their best to increase the frequency of verbal interaction occurrence and encourage students to initiate it as a means of more involvement in the ongoing learning activities.

Key words: Verbal Interaction, Online education, Initiation of Interaction, Engagement.

- Introduction

Online learning is a growing educational alternative for adults who, due to time and space constraints, cannot attend a traditional classroom. It has become popular as it offers the possibility to attend remote universities without having to move to new cities or countries. During the current situation, online learning has become a very popular tool to communicate and deliver information especially after the rapid worldwide Covid-19 dissemination and the difficulty in travelling.

Online learning refers to courses that are specially delivered on the internet in settings other than classroom where the teacher is teaching. It is an interactive way that enables a student to communicate with teachers or other students in their class.

The problem of the current research lies in the fact that since its introduction and heavy use few months ago in Iraqi education system, including all studying levels, there has been much controversy about the usefulness of the online classes as far as learners' seriousness in handling this new way of lecturing and the benefits derived are concerned. It is said that there is lacking of rapport between teachers; an issue that negatively impacts students learning at large and acquiring knowledge in their fields of specialization in particular.

Based on the preceding problem, it is hypothesized that

1. In EFL online classes, verbal interaction does not occur as required.

2. Verbal interaction in EFL online classes is mostly teacher initiated.

To support the already stated hypotheses, the following research questions await answers:

- Do EFL online classes have multi-directional verbal interaction?
- Who are initiating interaction in such classes, teachers or students?

This research aims at finding out

1. The extent of the occurrence of verbal interaction in EFL online classes at university level.
2. the party, i.e. teachers or students, who initiate verbal interaction in online Classes,

The research at hand is limited to the investigation of verbal interaction in EFL online classes at the Department of English, College of Arts, University of Mosul during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021 in terms of its frequency and initiation, i.e. the party starting verbal interaction, teachers or students.

This research is expected to be of some value to any student, teacher, researcher and scholar interested in acquiring more knowledge on how multifaceted interaction (i.e. teacher-student; student-student, student-teacher) takes place between teachers and students in EFL online classes at university level with focus on the frequency of its occurrence and initiation.

In order to conduct the current study, achieve the stated aims and validate the hypotheses, the study will be first theoretical, by attending to some topics of much relevance to the subject of the research, and practical represented by the researcher's attendance to a noticeable number of online classes to observe and fill in a checklist form designed for the purpose of the research.

The current research relies on Moore (1989) in terms of the types of interaction that are supposed to take place in classes in general and EFL classes in particular. Hence, Cowie's "*Quantitative Research in Applied Linguistics*" (2009) will be adopted in the analysis of the data collected by means of observing so as to pinpoint the frequency and type of teachers-students' (males and females) interaction inside the online classes. The choice of Cowie

(2009) as a model is due to its precision and exactness in covering the subject of interaction in academic settings.

- Theoretical Background

- Interaction: Introductory Remarks and Definition

Interaction plays a crucial role in education at large and the process of foreign language (FL) learning in particular. Quoting Thorne and Smith(2011: 269-270), Knight (2015: 8-9) points out that language acquisition studies have indicated the existence of a correlation between interaction, represented by its main components, namely input, performance and feedback, and learning. As such, learners, to whom the whole process of teaching and learning is directed, are supposed to be given the chance to “construct their information by active involvement in the educational process,” whether by contact with the teacher, the material, or other students (Courtney and King, 2009, p. 227).

Interaction is defined by Daniel and Marquis (1988) as a situation wherein a student is in two-way communication with one or more people. It is a synchronous and/or asynchronous conversation, debate, or occurrence between two or more participants and objects that is mediated by response or input and interfaced by technology.

Wagner (1994: 9) describes instructional interaction as "an occurrence of communication between a learner and the learner's environment, with the intention of responding to the learner in a way that changes his or her actions toward an educational goal". Finally, according to the Wikipedia, verbal interaction refers to a form of communication which uses spoken and written words for expressing and transferring views and ideas. In verbal interaction, language is the most important tool used by teachers and learners (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paralanguage>).

The operational definition of interaction is: The frequency of contact and communication that take place between teachers and students in EFL online classes at the Dept. of English, College of Arts, University of Mosul during the 2nd semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

- Nature and Characteristics of Interaction

Wagner (2011: 23) points out that interaction plays a crucial role in bringing the teacher and the students together in a very close contact especially when we know that all classroom activities revolve around such a contact. It is the classroom, the locus where everyday interaction between the teacher and the students takes place and in such a way that places interaction at the center of communicative competence (Brown, 2001: 167). Based on this, when students interact with each other, they receive input and produce output through language which is acquired by them as their communicative competence.

Within the classroom environment, interaction applies to the relationship between the teacher and the students and it is triggered by the exchange of emotions, feelings, or ideas resulted from the language input and output gained through interaction. In other words, teachers communicate with students not only verbally but also nonverbally so as to channel classroom interaction.

Walsh (2011: 33) specifies the following features of verbal interaction:

- (1) In direct-error correction, teacher interacts with students to correct errors made by them during ongoing conversation. By doing so, errors are resolved easily and explicitly, and much time is saved.
- (2) In material reviews, the teacher expresses personal reactions to naturally occurring remarks. Its aim is to provide oral fluency practice using conversational language that is suitable for their pedagogic purposes and language usage.

According to Brown's (2001:165), interaction is, in truth, the heart of communication: it is what communication is all about." As a result, learning can occur when the teacher and student work together to facilitate contact.

In an interactive classroom, teachers' traits, as well as teaching and learning, are all intertwined (Rido and Sari, (2018). Teachers in the classroom not only serve as a guide, facilitator, and counselor, but also make recommendations and ask questions as learners do the exercises (Rido,2017). They act as role models for the target language, lead and speed learning, and track and correct learners' progress (Walsh, 2011). Their positions determine the

characteristics of their classroom interaction (Richards and Schmidt, 2010).

In language classrooms, engagement is a prominent trend in which teachers and students interact to exchange information and experience. Since there is two-way contact and active engagement between teachers and students in classroom events, it improves the efficacy of language teaching-learning (Rido, 2017). Yet, it is worthy to note that teachers' lack of language proficiency is a major issue in language classrooms. As a result of the teachers' failure to facilitate meaningful interaction, the students become unable to comprehend the lesson (Mattarima and Hamdan, 2011; Lie 2007). Accordingly, teachers must keep up with the latest developments and provide their students with the best learning environment possible as the entire ecosystem changes (Lie, 2007; Suharti, 2013).

- Types of Interaction

Interaction forms a crucial component of the learning process. Moore (1989) in his seminal work on distance education, i.e. online learning, outlines four forms of interaction, namely teacher-learner-, learner-teacher, learner-learner and learner-content. This categorization framework "provides an easily observable, measurable variable for evaluating the impact of interaction in online courses" (Roblyer and Wiencke, 2003: 80). It is worth stating that transmission or presentation of knowledge, learner instruction, learner-teacher conversation, feedback, and learner motivation all represent these types of interactions. Furthermore, while Moore's classification of interaction has been extensively examined in online learning studies, the majority of these have focused on higher-education contexts (e.g., Jung, Choi, Lim and Leem, 2002; Kuo et al., 2014). Moore's interaction framework will enable the reader to comprehend interactions between teachers, learners, and content – or between senders and receivers– as well as the effects that these types of interaction have on online language learning.

Broadly speaking, learners' interaction with teachers, which according to Anderson (2003), has the highest perceived value among learners, falls under two of the types of interaction already highlighted, namely teacher- learner and learner -teacher.

First, teacher-learner interaction is the most common type as learners' performance is heavily influenced by the teacher's control over classroom communication, such as when learners respond to the teacher's questions (Altamiro, (2006). This type of interaction does not necessarily imply greater student satisfaction, even though the frequency and consistency of teacher-learner interaction may have a major impact on course completion rates (Hawkins et al., 2013). According to Vonderwell (2003), teachers must be careful about the way they arrange interactions with learners because rapid feedback does not always result in deep inquiry on the student's part.

In the teacher-learner type of interaction, teachers' proper support forms a main source of learners' better achievement. Otherwise, even advanced learners would fail in an online distance education setting (Beese, 2014). Teachers should also be aware of the fact that the less advanced a learner is, the more synchronous communication and assistance they are likely to need though the teacher's position may change to that of a "technical resource" rather than the traditional role (Ingerham, 2012: 74).

Second, Learner-teacher interaction is highly desirable as it is the teacher's primary goal to maintain learners' interest in what is being taught and motivate them to learn. It can take many different forms, from formal assessment and discipline to informal support, advice, and encouragement (Moore, 1989; Swan, 2002). It can also take place in real time, such as through video conferencing and online chats, or asynchronously, such as through emails and discussion boards (Bernard et al., 2009). Moore (1989: 7) adds that the efficacy of online learning is thought to be dependent on a high frequency and high quality of learner-teacher interaction.

Borup et al. (2014) state that pleasant learner-teacher interaction could boost learners' feelings of belonging, while Watson (2007: 8) points out that regular learner-instructor interaction keeps academic dishonesty to a minimum. Also, Arbaugh (2000) found out that the only factor that significantly impacted learning in online MBA courses was interaction between learners and teachers. Similarly, Marks et al. (2005) discovered that the impact of learner-teacher interaction on perceived learning was

double that of learner-learner interaction in graduate-level courses. Finally, Kuo et al. (2014) found out that in higher education, learner-teacher interaction had a positive impact on learners' satisfaction.

In addition to the preceding types of interaction, there remain two more types that are worthy of consideration and are as follows:

Moore (1993: 229) stressed the importance of learners' contact with their peers since it is an extremely useful resource for learning. Learner-learner interaction refers to the sharing of knowledge and ideas among learners including the collaborative activities wherein learners work together to complete some course projects and assignments. It exists in the learning settings in the form of collaborative tasks and group work, yet many online tools, such as forums, chat rooms, document sharing apps, and video conferencing subgroups, can facilitate such tasks. Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) states that any collaborative learning exercise requires learner-learner interaction as it is beneficial for cognitive development, language learning, and motivational support. According to Wagner (1997), learner-learner interaction aided the development of critical thinking skills, while Anderson (2003) discovered that learner-learner interaction aided the development of deeper learning and a lack of learner-learner interaction led to feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction among high-school students. The level of learner-learner interaction, according to Beldarrain (2008: 6), has a positive effect on learners' achievement at the postsecondary level based on research on learner-learner interaction in online environments. Finally, Anderson (2003) and Bernard et al. (2009) concluded that synthesis of previous studies on postsecondary distance education engaging in learner-learner interaction tends to improve achievement.

Learner-content interaction according to Moore (1989: 1), is "a fundamental feature of education" as it represents the process of a learner's mind shifting its perception, perspectives, and cognitive constructs by intellectually engaging with the content, and that "education cannot exist without it" since learners internalize knowledge they encounter on the basis of material interaction which, in turn, stimulates changes in their comprehension,

expectations, or even mind cognitive mechanisms (cited in Murray, Perez, Geist and Hedrick, 2012: 128). It is a one-way flow of information from the subject matter to the learner and stands for a range of pedagogical resources and tasks such as audio and video presentations, individual or group projects, and so on, used in online learning (Moore, 1989: 9). It exists when learners read instructional materials or engage in task-oriented learning, and consequently has become the most popular type of interaction in online learning (Jung et al., 2002). It can serve to reinforce learners' roles as information creators (Moore and Kearsley, 2011).

- Interaction in Education: Importance and Benefits

Interaction between learners and teachers has formed an important aspect of the online learning for both learners and teachers (Hawkins, Graham, Sudweeks and Barbour, 2013). To provide high-quality education at large and online education in particular, many educators emphasize the value of interaction. Interaction, for example, is defined by Shale and Garrison (1990: 1) as "education in its most basic form". Added to that, according to Palloff and Pratt (1999: 5), the "keys to the learning process are the interactions among learners' themselves, the interactions between faculty and students, and the cooperation in learning that results from these interactions". On his part, Moore (1992: 1), asserts increasing learner-teacher contact can lead to a better learning experience. More asserts increasing efficient learning and a smaller transactional distance (i.e., a physical separation that results in a psychological and communicative gap). Increased engagement, according to other empirical research, leads to increased student course satisfaction and learning outcomes (Zhang and Fulford, 1994; Zirkin and Sumler, 1995).

Woods (2002) asserts that learners' effectiveness in online classes often need various levels of interaction since a customized approach to that interaction can be beneficial. Warden, Stanworth, Ren and Warden (2013) demonstrate how teachers can create a positive atmosphere for online learning by focusing on social interactions similar to those found in a traditional classroom.

Since interaction has been shown to be a critical component of online and blended learning's performance, it is critical to know

how teachers and students view interaction in online and blended secondary courses (Blaine, 2019). According to Ware (2004: 32), carefully planned and deliberate interaction can be successful in supporting learners' working through online courses, particularly because learners can have very different expectations of interaction. Cole, Shelley, and Swartz (2014) discovered that the key cause of frustration in online courses was a lack of interaction, while learners' satisfaction with a course does not always suggest that meaningful learning occurred (Driscoll et al., 2012), but learners' accounts of unique engagement interactions may point to places where we can enhance our educational experiences in this domain.

- Interaction in Foreign Language Classes

Interaction is referred to as engagement a teaching/learning environment where there is a chance that learners will learn something. Allwright (1984:156) views interaction as a "fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy" since "all that happens in the classroom happens through a mechanism of live person-to-person contact." Learners further attempt to produce understandable output, which then serves as sources of feedback for others.

Language classrooms are collaborative environments in which teachers and students engage socially to teach and learn. The interactions and relationships that occur between teachers and learners, as well as among students as they work side by side, make up the classroom's community processes. They are considered sociolinguistic environments and discourse groups where learners' language learning is thought to be helped by interaction. Added to that, interactive processes are not purely individual or identical across learners and situations. Language learning is a collective enterprise, collectively built, and intrinsically related to learners' repeated and frequent involvement in classroom activities (Hall and Verplaetse, 2000). These authors further maintain that in FL classrooms, teachers and learners collaborate to create conceptual and functional experiences that influence both the form and content of the target language, as well as the processes and outcomes of individual growth, through their interactions with one another.

Since FL learning theorists believe that interaction is the foundation of acquisition, in FL classes, learners are expected to use

a range of techniques to communicate meaning, pursue right understanding, or compensate for a communication breakdown. The input that students receive from their teachers and peers helps them to “test their ideas and improve their development awareness of the language system” (Hedge, 2000), and thus acts as a language development facilitator. Altamiro (2006: 93) further states that input and interaction can aid the creation of the natural route of SLA by resulting in comprehensible input through interaction.

In EFL online classes, learners communicate electronically with one another as individuals or as a collective in learner-to-learner interaction. Educators that use constructivist oriented learning emphasize the importance of learners engaging with one another by using small group teaching exercises that can improve their knowledge building and social cognition skills (Anderson, 2003: 7). This emphasizes the importance of collective and cooperative learning as inter- and intra-peer cooperation is fostered by learner-to-learner engagement in group work.

The level of the teacher’s social presence, the quality of input (i.e. reliable and timely), and the analytical complexity of the discussion are all factors in the student-teacher interaction (Berge, 2002). Teachers must develop strategies that affirm learners' current academic progress while also assisting them in achieving their professional and personal objectives, as many learners may be new to distance and online education. Teachers must design a classroom system that encourages social interaction while also encouraging independent learning (Jaffee, 1999). Collis (1998: 9) believes that contact habits for both learners and teachers should be versatile. When students have specific needs, they should be able to ask questions of the instructor and expect a timely answer.

In online education, interactivity and interactions are critical to the learning process as they serve a number of purposes in the FL learning process:

- enabling successful facilitation of learning to fit individual learner's needs and learning styles; allowing learner feedback to the learning process as well as enabling learners to take ownership and control of their learning; encouraging constructive

- and participative learning on a one-to-one basis or within a group or learning community through social dialogue;
- facilitating the production of higher-order knowledge and skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, judgment/decision-making skills, reflection, and so on;
 - providing useful input on the teaching and learning process in order to improve the consistency and expectations of the learning experience (Fahy, 2003; Juwah, 2003).
- Techniques to Enhance Interaction in Foreign Language Classes**

Interaction in FL classes can assuredly be enhanced by teachers due to the pivotal and varied roles they play in such classes. As such, teachers' assistance, i.e. scaffolding; a point that will be enlarged upon in the following section, forms a key means of creating, developing and establishing positive and workable interaction. According to Fojkar (2005: 133-134), teachers can interact with learners in FL classes by:

- Asking Questions

Answering questions is better for learners than starting a discussion or making up an individual argument. With questions, the teacher indicates some of the words and language constructs that will appear in the response. Teachers should ask more questions to help the learners find the correct answer. This technique may be used to retelling stories or writing explanations.

- Body Language

Teachers' movements and mime, namely body language to express themselves, form a rich source of imparting knowledge to learners.

- A topic

Teachers' selection of relevant subjects can inspire learners to engage. In addition to the topics that are already among learners, learners can tell a lot more about a subject they are passionate about than they can about something they do not know anything about.

Johnstone (1989: 9) defines a set of techniques used to help learners understand the teachers' utterance and communicate appropriately:

- "Continual verification of comprehension,

- Using familiar words,
- Using a lower degree of cognition,
- Repetition,
- Reused knowledge,
- Paraphrase,
- Redundancy in other areas,
- Slower and clearer voice,
- Using exaggerated intonation and emphasis
- Using structurally condensed language,
- Discourse markers' clarity,
- Important terminology and structures,
- Simple tasks that are announced ahead of time,
- Routineization,
- Translation into the first language.

On his part, Moon (2000: 71) suggests the following techniques:

- Showing real interest in learners' responses and listening favorably to them as a means to encourage talking on the part of the learners.
- Encouraging learners to attend positively to language accuracy.
- Using English at a level that is understandable by the learners so as to enable them to receive further feedback.
- Helping learners to articulate their messages by encouraging them to speak more as a means of pushing them to use the language for communication.
- Relating talk to contexts that are common and meaningful to learners, such as learners' own news, to encourage and motivate them to speak.
- Working together with learners to accomplish a joint goal.
- Developing learners self-esteem so as to take risks since learners are subject to their peers' judgement as they attempt to speak. Here, the general environment in the classroom is quite important. It should be positive and encourage learners to use language in new ways.

Since communication forms a corner stone for initiating and developing teacher-learner interaction in FL classes, Bygate (1987,

42) cited in Fojkar (2005: 136) divides communication strategies into the following two categories:

- **Achievement Strategies** represented by those of guessing, paraphrasing, collaboration, reduction and contingency. For instance, a problem of speech can be compensated for by both achievement and reduction strategies. The former are used when a section or a full message is abandoned, while the latter are used to compensate for a language difference. By limiting speaking to what can be said, the speaker adapts his utterance to his language competence. Even though he shortens his speaking switch, he is still able to retain the fluency of an interaction.

When a speaker uses guessing tactics, he searches for a term he does not understand or is not sure of its meaning.

Bygate (1987, 44) further distinguishes two types of paraphrase strategies:

- a. Searching one's information for a synonym or a more general term (i.e. a superordinate) to convey meaning is a lexical replacement technique.
- b. Expressing one's intention with more than one word (e.g., "you clean your teeth with it" rather than "a tooth brush"), circumlocution is used.

Cooperative strategies are a further form of achievement strategy. They are used as the learner may seek assistance in a variety of ways, including asking for a translation of his mother-tongue phrase in the middle of their sentence, pointing to the item he wants to name, or miming. Finally, avoidance strategies cause learners to change their message in order to prevent communication problems. They may want to avoid problems with phonemic, grammatical, or lexical issues.

According to Johnstone (1989, 67), a learner may

- Assume the position of a listener and only respond in short sentences,
- Make do with mostly nonverbal communication,
- Avoid or deflect a topic should,
- Use as little language as possible to avoid sending confusing messages,
- Use a lot of set phrases,

- Distort truth as it is easier to say things that are not true, and
- Give a false excuse to avoid interaction (e.g. saying that he has to leave).

- Methodology

This section is dedicated to the discussion and description of the methods and procedures used by the researcher to collect data through live observation in a variety of linguistics and literature online classes. It further describes and demonstrates how the collected data have been interpreted and analyzed in order to shed light on the essence of verbal contact between teachers and learners in EFL online classes.

It is worthy to note that the researcher, after deciding on the topic of the research and having the research plan of doing a part of the research practically, got official permission from the English Language Department/ College of Arts/ University of Mosul to attend online classes taught by a number of teachers of both linguistics and literature whose cooperation and assistance are highly appreciated.

- The Population and Sample of the Research

As the main aim of the current research is to investigate verbal interaction in EFL online classes at the university level, the target population included all the studying stages of the English Language Department /College of Arts / University of Mosul during the academic year 2020-2021 side by side with the faculty members, i.e. the teaching staff of the department in question.

As for the research sample, it has to be clarified in terms of both the classes observed by the researcher and the teachers of these classes. Concerning the classes observed, there were 90 classes/lectures of linguistics and literature. Each one of the 90 classes was observed for about 45 minutes. As such, the overall observation time for the 90 classes came to be about 4000 minutes. Such counting of time in minutes is necessary as equivalence between the duration of observing linguistic classes and that of literature classes is quite necessary for the validity and the reliability if the results are arrived at. Based on that, 2000 minutes were allocated to 45 linguistics classes and the same amount of time was allocated to the 45 literature classes. It is worth mentioning that all

the 90 classes covered the four study stages at the Department, i.e. first, second, third, and fourth.

As for the teachers whose classes were observed, they were 3 teachers of linguistics and 3 of literature. They were 4 male teachers and 2 females, 2 male and 1 female linguistics teachers and 2 male and 1 female literature teachers. They were teaching 6 different subjects throughout the observation period.

For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, the three linguistics teachers were given symbols instead of their names, A-Lin., B-Lin. and C-Lin. Symbols were also given to the subjects they were teaching, viz. Lin.-1, Lin.-2 and Lin.-3. The same procedure was followed as the teachers of literature were given the symbols A-Lit., B-Lit. and C-Lit. and the subjects they were teaching were labeled as Lit.-1, Lit.-2 and Lit.-3.

- Methods of Data collection

To collect that required for fulfilling the purposes of the current research, the researcher adopted the procedure outlined in the following lines:

1. Starting the observations on the selected classes through the Google classroom on 6th December, 2020 and ending them on 16th March, 2021.
2. Planning in advance to avoid observations on the days where teachers were assigning online examinations.
3. Conducting observations of the classes attended by a reasonable number of learners.
4. Participating, observing and focusing on verbal interaction, in terms of its main types, namely teacher-learner, learner-learner and learner-teacher, between teachers and learners in the 15 classes taught by each one of the 6 teachers selected to represent the study's sample. Here, it should be stated that the researcher was, in addition to observing, sound recording the proceedings of the classes in order to get satisfactory and reliable data for later analysis

- Procedure of Data Recording

The procedure of the data recording in the current research has been done by doing of the following:

- Taking the teacher's consent to record the lectures.

- Assigning a specific symbol to each of the classroom sound recordings before saving them in the laptop.
- Saving the recorded lecture on the Google Drive in the laptop.
- Using a headset, listening to each online classroom's sound-recorded verbal interaction and comparing it to the verbal interaction encoded in the encoding sheets during observation.
- Recording the verbal interaction in each observed class on the mobile phone simultaneously with its verbal interaction encoding in the classroom in a particular time unit.
- Turning off the sound recorder on finishing the encoding of that time unit.
- Repeating the same process throughout all class observations.

- Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

This section focuses on the data analysis and discussion of results in relation to the study objectives. It illustrates the process of verbal interaction in each one of the observations of 90 lectures, 45 linguistics and 45 literature online classes during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

The observation of each one of the 90 classes covered a time range of 40-49 minutes. So, to provide equivalence between both groups of classes, i.e. linguistics and literature, the same time duration on the basis of the whole duration of observation, namely 1200 minutes, has been set on the basis of the whole duration of observation.

For better understanding of the detailed contents of the tables that are based on the jotting down and recording of the details of verbal interaction in these 90 online classes and before embarking on data analysis, it seems quite demanding to state the way that these 90 linguistics and literature online classes including the labeling of the 6 teachers whose subjects and duly online classes have been selected for observation.

Since the contents of two tables, one for Linguistics Online Classes and another for Literature Online Classes, will be the data for analysis, it is worthwhile to shed light on such contents by viewing the tables from the left and highlighting that:

- **Column 1:** The number of the sessions observed by the researcher.
- **Column 2:** The dates of observing the sessions.
- **Column 3:** The durations of the sessions.
- **Column 4:** The Symbols for labeling teachers.
- **Column 5:** Teachers' initiated Interactions.
- **Column 6:** Students initiated interactions.
- **Column 7:** Total number of interactions initiated by teachers and students.

Session No.	Date of Observation	Duration of the Session	Teacher symbol	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Student Initiated Interaction	Total
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- Description of Linguistics Sessions

Concerning column no.4, i.e. the column for labeling teachers. The first teacher of linguistics is given the symbol (Ling:A) and the subject he was teaching, namely phonology is given the label (Ling.1). The researcher attended 15 online sessions by this teacher. The teacher initiated interaction 10-20 times in these 15 sessions compared to students' initiation which ranged from 4 to 11 times. The average number of students attending these sessions was 92.

Similarly, the label (Ling:B) is given to the second teacher who was teaching semantics and his sessions of this subject are labeled by (Ling.2). The researcher also attended 15 sessions by this teacher. Teachers' initiation of verbal interaction in these 15 semantics sessions ranged from 7 to 12, while that of the students in the same sessions ranged from 4 to 11. The average number of students attending these sessions was 74.

Finally, the label (Ling:C) is given to the third teacher who was teaching grammar and his sessions of this subject are labeled by (Ling.3). The researcher also attended 15 sessions by this teacher. Teachers' initiation of verbal interaction in these 15 grammar sessions ranged from 5 to 12, while that of the students in the same sessions ranged from 2 to 5. The average number of students attending these sessions was 55.

- Description of Literature Online Sessions

It is worth stating that the first teacher of linguistics is given the symbol (Lit:A) and the subject he was teaching, namely novel is given the label (Ling.1). The researcher attended 15 online sessions

by this teacher. The teacher initiated interaction 4 to 10 times in these 15 sessions compared to students' initiation which ranged from 2 to 5 times. The average number of students attending these sessions was 74.

Similarly, the label (Lit:B) is given to the second teacher who was teaching drama and his sessions of this subject are labeled by (Lit.2). The researcher also attended 15 sessions by this teacher. Teachers' initiation of verbal interaction in these 15 drama sessions ranged from 3 to 8, while that of the students in the same sessions ranged from 1 to 4. The average number of students attending these sessions was 55.

Finally, the label (Lit:C) is given to the third teacher who was teaching modern poetry and his sessions of this subject are labeled by (Lit.3). The researcher also attended 15 sessions by this teacher. Teachers' initiation of verbal interaction in these 15 grammar sessions ranged from 4 to 8, while that of the students in the same sessions ranged from 1 to 4. The average number of students attending these sessions was 74.

In the following pages, the analysis of the collected data will be done on the basis of proposed hypotheses, the set aims and the research question.

- Data Analysis

Part One: Occurrence of Verbal Interaction in EFL Online Classes

Hypothesis No.1: In EFL online classes, verbal interaction does not occur as required.

Research Q. no.1: Do EFL online classes have multi-directional verbal interaction?

Aim No.1: Finding out if verbal interaction occurs in EFL online classes at university level.

To validate hypothesis no.1 and bring about aim no.1, tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the frequency of the occurrence of verbal interaction in the online classes observed by the researcher.

Table 1: The Frequency of the Occurrence of Verbal Interaction in Linguistics Online Classes

Session No.	Date	Duration of the Session	Teacher symbol	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Student Initiated Interaction	Total
1	6/12/2020	44 Min	Ling : A	20	11	31
2	13/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : A	15	8	23
3	20/12/2020	46 Min	Ling : A	11	4	15
4	27/12/2020	43 Min	Ling : A	16	9	25
5	29/12/2020	47 Min	Ling : A	12	5	17
6	4 /1 /2021	47 Min	Ling : A	14	9	23
7	11/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	17	7	24
8	18/1 /2021	48 Min	Ling : A	15	6	21
9	24/1 /2021	42 Min	Ling : A	11	4	15
10	26/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	13	7	20
11	9 /2 /2021	45 Min	Ling : A	16	9	25
12	15/2 /2021	46 Min	Ling : A	12	6	18
13	22/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	11	3	14
14	7 /3 /2021	47 Min	Ling : A	15	6	21
15	16/3 /2021	45 Min	Ling : A	10	4	14
16	27/12/2020	47 Min	Ling : B	9	4	13
17	31/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : B	11	3	14
18	14/1 /2021	45 Min	Ling : B	9	3	12
19	15/1 /2021	40 Min	Ling : B	10	4	14
20	28/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	7	2	9
21	31/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	8	2	10
22	6/2 /2021	49 Min	Ling : B	12	3	15
23	11/2 /2021	43 Min	Ling : B	10	5	15
24	19/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	8	4	12
25	20/2 /2021	42 Min	Ling : B	11	6	17
26	21/2 /2021	45 Min	Ling : B	9	5	14
27	22/2 /2021	44 Min	Ling : B	12	7	19
28	24/2 /2021	47 Min	Ling : B	10	3	13
29	7/3 /2021	40 Min	Ling : B	12	5	17
30	10/3 /2021	42 Min	Ling : B	9	3	12
31	13/12/2020	42 Min	Ling : C	5	2	7
32	17/12/2020	46 Min	Ling : C	7	3	10
33	21/12/2020	45 Min	Ling : C	11	4	15
34	28/12/2020	49 Min	Ling : C	9	3	12
35	30/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : C	10	3	13
36	10/1 /2021	46 Min	Ling : C	12	4	16
37	15/1 /2021	44 min	Ling : C	8	3	11
38	24/1 /2021	42 Min	Ling : C	10	4	14
39	29/1 /2021	46 Min	Ling : C	9	3	12
40	1/2 /2021	48 Min	Ling : C	11	5	16
41	7/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : C	10	4	14
42	13/2 /2021	47 Min	Ling : C	7	2	9
43	21/2 /2021	44 Min	Ling : C	9	4	13
44	3/3 /2021	49 Min	Ling : C	12	5	17
45	10/3 /2021	42 Min	Ling : C	8	3	11
Total				493	209	702

Table 2: The Frequency of the Occurrence of Verbal Interaction in Literature Online Classes

Session No.	Date	Duration of the Sessions	Teacher symbol	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Student Initiated Interaction	Total
1	8/12/2020	50 Min	Lit : A	9	5	14
2	9/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : A	7	3	10
3	16/12/2020	48 Min	Lit : A	6	2	8
4	20/12/2020	41 Min	Lit : A	6	3	9
5	23/12/2020	49 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
6	27/12/2020	43 Min	Lit : A	10	4	14
7	7 /1 /2021	44 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
8	13/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
9	20/1 /2021	47 Min	Lit : A	7	3	10
10	24/1 /2021	40 Min	Lit : A	4	1	5
11	28/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
12	4 /2 /2021	44 Min	Lit : A	6	2	8
13	14/2 /2021	45 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
14	25 /3 /2021	46 Min	Lit : A	4	2	6
15	6 /3 /2021	41 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
16	20/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : B	5	2	7
17	21/12/2020	44 Min	Lit : B	7	3	10
18	23/12/2020	48 Min	Lit : B	6	3	9
19	27/12/2020	43 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
20	28/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : B	4	1	5
21	4 /1 /2021	44Min	Lit : B	6	2	8
22	10/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	3	1	4
23	11/1 /2021	46 Min	Lit : B	7	4	11
24	17/1 /2021	45 Min	Lit : B	5	2	7
25	18/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
26	21/1 / 2021	48 Min	Lit : B	6	1	7
27	4 /2 /2021	45 Min	Lit : B	8	4	12
28	7 /2 /2021	43 Min	Lit : B	6	3	9
29	11/2 /2021	48 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
30	15/2 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	7	4	11
31	27/12/2020	46 Min	Lit : C	5	2	7
32	4/1 /2021	42Min	Lit : C	8	3	11
33	18/1 /2021	44Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
34	24/1 /2021	45 Min	Lit : C	7	2	9
35	26/1 /2021	40 Min	Lit : C	4	1	5
36	2/2 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
37	9/2 /2021	45 min	Lit : C	5	1	6
38	15/2 /2021	46 Min	Lit : C	7	3	10
39	16/2 /2021	44 Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
40	21/2 /2021	40 Min	Lit : C	8	3	11
41	2/3 /2021	44 Min	Lit : C	8	4	12
42	3/3 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	6	3	9
43	7/3 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	5	2	7
44	9/3 /2021	45 Min	Lit : C	7	4	11
45	11/3 /2021	48 Min	Lit : C	4	2	6
Total				275	115	390

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the frequent occurrence of verbal interaction in EFL classes at university level. The 45 linguistics online classes witnessed the occurrence of 702 verbal interactions compared to the literature online classes where 390 verbal interaction occurred. The total number of verbal interaction in both linguistics and literature EFL online classes is 1092. As such, hypothesis no.1 which states “In EFL online classes, verbal interaction does not occur as required” is rejected.

Part Two : Initiation of Verbal Interaction in Online Classes

Hypothesis no.2: Verbal interaction in EFL online classes is mostly teacher initiated.

Research Question. no.2: Who are initiating interaction in such classes, teachers or students?

Aim no.2: Identifying the party, i.e. teachers or students, who initiate verbal interaction in online classes,

Tables 3 and.4 show the frequency of the occurrence of verbal interaction in the observed online classes.

Table 3: The frequency of the Occurrence of Teachers and Students' Verbal Interaction Initiation in Linguistics Online Classes

Session No.	Date	Duration of the Sessions	Teacher symbol	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Student Initiated Interaction	Total
1	6/12/2020	44 Min	Ling : A	20	11	31
2	13/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : A	15	8	23
3	20/12/2020	46 Min	Ling : A	11	4	15
4	27/12/2020	43 Min	Ling : A	16	9	25
5	29/12/2020	47 Min	Ling : A	12	5	17
6	4 /1 /2021	47 Min	Ling : A	14	9	23
7	11/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	17	7	24
8	18/1 /2021	48 Min	Ling : A	15	6	21
9	24/1 /2021	42 Min	Ling : A	11	4	15
10	26/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	13	7	20
11	9 /2 /2021	45 Min	Ling : A	16	9	25
12	15/2 /2021	46 Min	Ling : A	12	6	18
13	22/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : A	11	3	14
14	7 /3 /2021	47 Min	Ling : A	15	6	21
15	16/3 /2021	45 Min	Ling : A	10	4	14
16	27/12/2020	47 Min	Ling : B	9	4	13
17	31/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : B	11	3	14
18	14/1 /2021	45 Min	Ling : B	9	3	12
19	15/1 /2021	40 Min	Ling : B	10	4	14
20	28/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	7	2	9
21	31/1 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	8	2	10
22	6/2 /2021	49 Min	Ling : B	12	3	15
23	11/2 /2021	43 Min	Ling : B	10	5	15
24	19/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : B	8	4	12
25	20/2 /2021	42 Min	Ling : B	11	6	17
26	21/2 2021	45 Min	Ling : B	9	5	14
27	22/2 /2021	44 Min	Ling : B	12	7	19
28	24/2 /2021	47 Min	Ling : B	10	3	13
29	7/3 /2021	40 Min	Ling : B	12	5	17
30	10/3 /2021	42 Min	Ling : B	9	3	12
31	13/12/2020	42 Min	Ling : C	5	2	7
32	17/12/2020	46 Min	Ling : C	7	3	10
33	21/12/2020	45 Min	Ling : C	11	4	15
34	28/12/2020	49 Min	Ling : C	9	3	12
35	30/12/2020	40 Min	Ling : C	10	3	13
36	10/1 /2021	46 Min	Ling : C	12	4	16
37	15/1 /2021	44 min	Ling : C	8	3	11
38	24/1 /2021	42 Min	Ling : C	10	4	14
39	29/1 /2021	46 Min	Ling : C	9	3	12
40	1/2 /2021	48 Min	Ling : C	11	5	16
41	7/2 /2021	41 Min	Ling : C	10	4	14
42	13/2 /2021	47 Min	Ling : C	7	2	9
43	21/2 /2021	44 Min	Ling : C	9	4	13
44	3/3 /2021	49 Min	Ling : C	12	5	17
45	10/3 /2021	42 Min	Ling : C	8	3	11
Total				493	209	702

Table 4: The frequency of the Occurrence of Teachers and Students' Verbal Interaction Initiation in Literature Online Classes

Session No.	Date	Duration of the Sessions	Teacher symbol	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Student Initiated Interaction	Total
1	8/12/2020	50 Min	Lit : A	9	5	14
2	9/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : A	7	3	10
3	16/12/2020	48 Min	Lit : A	6	2	8
4	20/12/2020	41 Min	Lit : A	6	3	9
5	23/12/2020	49 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
6	27/12/2020	43 Min	Lit : A	10	4	14
7	7 /1 /2021	44 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
8	13/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
9	20/1 /2021	47 Min	Lit : A	7	3	10
10	24/1 /2021	40 Min	Lit : A	4	1	5
11	28/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
12	4 /2 /2021	44 Min	Lit : A	6	2	8
13	14/2 /2021	45 Min	Lit : A	8	3	11
14	25 /3 /2021	46 Min	Lit : A	4	2	6
15	6 /3 /2021	41 Min	Lit : A	5	2	7
16	20/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : B	5	2	7
17	21/12/2020	44 Min	Lit : B	7	3	10
18	23/12/2020	48 Min	Lit : B	6	3	9
19	27/12/2020	43 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
20	28/12/2020	40 Min	Lit : B	4	1	5
21	4 /1 /2021	44Min	Lit : B	6	2	8
22	10/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	3	1	4
23	11/1 /2021	46 Min	Lit : B	7	4	11
24	17/1 /2021	45 Min	Lit : B	5	2	7
25	18/1 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
26	21/1 / 2021	48 Min	Lit : B	6	1	7
27	4 /2 /2021	45 Min	Lit : B	8	4	12
28	7 /2 /2021	43 Min	Lit : B	6	3	9
29	11/2 /2021	48 Min	Lit : B	5	3	8
30	15/2 /2021	42 Min	Lit : B	7	4	11
31	27/12/2020	46 Min	Lit : C	5	2	7
32	4/1 /2021	42Min	Lit : C	8	3	11
33	18/1 /2021	44Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
34	24/1 /2021	45 Min	Lit : C	7	2	9
35	26/1 /2021	40 Min	Lit : C	4	1	5
36	2/2 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
37	9/2 /2021	45 min	Lit : C	5	1	6
38	15/2 /2021	46 Min	Lit : C	7	3	10
39	16/2 /2021	44 Min	Lit : C	6	2	8
40	21/2 /2021	40 Min	Lit : C	8	3	11
41	2/3 /2021	44 Min	Lit : C	8	4	12
42	3/3 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	6	3	9
43	7/3 /2021	43 Min	Lit : C	5	2	7
44	9/3 /2021	45 Min	Lit : C	7	4	11
45	11/3 /2021	48 Min	Lit : C	4	2	6
Total				275	115	390

Out of the 702 verbal interaction cases in Linguistics online classes, 493, i.e. 70 % are teacher initiated. The same applies to the literature online classes as 275 verbal interaction cases, i.e. 70 % , out of the 390 cases are also teacher initiated. As such, hypothesis no.2 which states “Verbal interaction in EFL online classes is mostly teacher initiated” is accepted.

- Findings

It is worthy to note that the analysis of the data collected via the observation of the 90 online classes, 45 linguistics classes and 45 literature classes with an estimated time duration of 1200 minutes for each 45 classes, has come out with the following findings:

1. Verbal interaction in EFL online classes is of a satisfactory frequency.
2. Verbal interaction in EFL online classes, linguistics and literature, is mostly initiated by teachers.

- Conclusions and Recommendations

The current research study has been conducted to investigate verbal interaction in EFL online classes at university level. It has been theoretical as light has been shed on the definition, nature, types of interaction and the techniques to prompt learners in EFL online classes to be involved in the ongoing activities and duly be a side in interaction. Practically speaking, this study has set out of two main hypotheses which successively state that in EFL online classes, verbal interaction does not occur as required and verbal interaction in EFL online classes is mostly teacher initiated. To validate the preceding hypotheses, 90 EFL online classes, 45 linguistics and 45 literature, have been observed by the researcher. On analyzing the data collected observation, it has been found that verbal interaction in EFL online classes is of a satisfactory frequency and it is mostly initiated by teachers. In the light of these findings, the following recommendations have been put forward:

1. Due to its role in building EFL learners’ confidence and duly triggering their involvement in the ongoing activities, teachers of the varied subjects of linguistics and literature should encourage learners to participate in the discussions.

2. Since verbal interaction gives EFL learners a chance to develop their oral skills, namely listening and speaking, teachers have to introduce and implement teaching material and activities that provide learners with more chances to participate in the varied ongoing activities.
3. Since the updated pedagogical approaches emphasize learner-centeredness as a means to develop and improve their learning, EFL learners should be encouraged to initiate interaction among themselves or with the teachers.

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دراسة حدوث وبدء التفاعل اللفظي في صفوف تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة
أجنبية عبر الإنترنت في المستوى الجامعي

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المستخلص

تفعل صفوف اللغة الأجنبية عادة من خلال مجموعة متباينة من الاستراتيجيات والآليات التي يستقدمها التدريسيون والطلبة أو التي يسهمون فيها بغية تحقيق تعلم أكثر فاعلية وانخراط أوسع في الفعاليات الجارية، ويلعب التفاعل من خلال أشكاله المختلفة

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دورًا محوريًا في تأجيح رغبة الطلبة وتحفيزهم للاشتراك في عملية التعلّم، ويشير التفاعل اللفظي إلى مخاطبة التدريسيين لطلبتهم أو العكس أو مخاطبة الطلبة لبعضهم بعضًا، وقد بات التفاعل اللفظي موضوعًا ذا تاريخ طويل من الدراسة والبحث في النظام التربوي التقليدي المتمثل بمقابلة التدريسي والطالب لبعضهم بعضًا وجهًا لوجه في الصف الدراسي، أمّا التفاعل في الصفوف الإلكترونية فقد أولى عناية كبيرة في الوقت الحاضر بشكل خاص بعد تفشي فيروس كوفيد-19 الذي أجبر كل المؤسسات التربوية في كل أنحاء العالم على الإغلاق والتحوّل إلى الصفوف الإلكترونية؛ ولذلك يهدف البحث الحالي إلى دراسة وتقصّي التفاعل اللفظي في دروس اللغة الأجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية من حيث تكرار حدوثه والطرف البادئ بالتفاعل أو المخاطبة، وتفترض الدراسة بأنّ التفاعل اللفظي لا يحدث بالشكل المطلوب والتدريسيون هم الطرف البادئ بالتفاعل اللفظي؛ لإثبات صحّة الفرضيتين السابقتين وتحقيق الأهداف المتوخاة قامت الباحثة بالحضور والمراقبة الشخصية لـ 90 محاضرة إلكترونية، 40 محاضرة في اللغة ومثلها في الأدب مع الأخذ بالحسبان مدة كل محاضرة التي تراوحت من 40 إلى 45 دقيقة، وجمعت البيانات ذات العلاقة باستعمال قائمة أعدت من الباحثة، وعند تحليل البيانات، وجد أنّ التفاعل اللفظي يحدث في محاضرات اللغة الأجنبية، اللغة والأدب، بشكل معقول وأنّ التدريسيين هم الطرف الأكثر بدءًا بها، وعلى ضوء هذه النتائج، ولأهمية التفاعل اللفظي التربوية والتعليمية تمت التوصية بأن يبذل التدريسيون قصارى جهدهم لزيادة حدوث التفاعل اللفظي وتشجيع الطلبة على البدء بها وسيلة لإشغالهم بشكل أكثر في الفعاليات التعليمية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاعل اللفظي، التعليم الإلكتروني، البدء بالتفاعل، الأشغال.