

# A Comparative Study of Managing Learning Opportunity in EFL Classroom

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## Abstract

Learning opportunity plays a vital role in EFL classroom learning. Drawing on conversation analysis and comparison methods, focusing on correction activities in an experienced EFL teacher's classroom and a novice EFL teacher's classroom in China, this study aims to explore the differences in their practices of turn allocation for increasing learning opportunities. The study finds that the experienced teacher designs more rich turn allocation, that is, to add more turn allocation practices, to involve more students to participate in the classroom interaction, to lengthen the period for students' involvement. In these ways, she creates more learning opportunities for students compared with novice EFL teacher. Although the result is pertinent, it might deepen understanding of high-quality EFL classroom interaction and promote EFL teachers to discover, create or maintain more learning opportunities for students.

**Keywords:** learning opportunities, turn allocation, nomination, invitation to reply, invitation to bid

## 1. Introduction

In classroom interaction, Learning opportunity (LO), as an opportunity produced and maintained by participants' cooperation (Cancino, 2015), is a hot topic. A great number of studies in this field focus on the theoretical frameworks. For example, Crabbe (2003) made a LO framework under the guidance of the management inquiry in a social context. In the latest studies, some researchers have diverted to participants' interaction practice. For example, Paul (2019) uses conversation analysis (CA) to examine how Japanese as 1<sup>st</sup> language in repair sequences in English classrooms to provide LO for students. Much as these studies, few focus on turn allocation role in providing LO. Turn allocation, normatively organized, is a methodical procedure that exhibits participants' normative orientations to the achievement of the orderly distribution of opportunities to take a turn-at-talk (Hayashi, 2013, p. 167). So LOs can be observed well in classroom interaction by looking at turn allocation practices. CA has one essential focus on turn allocation, and has "the capacity to exam the details how the opportunities for L2 learning to arise in interactional activities" (Kasper, 2006, p. 83). Therefore, drawing on conversation analysis and comparison methods, focusing on correction activities in an experienced EFL teacher's and a novice EFL teacher's classroom in China, this study aims to better explore whether or not they are different in managing learning opportunities when doing turn allocation in correction activities. And if so, how do the two EFL teachers do in error-free situation and in erroneous situation. Practically, this study is to uncover the practice of how learning happens in language classroom interaction, which is good for improving teaching. Theoretically, it can enrich language pedagogical knowledge for language teacher education.

## 2. Learning Opportunity and Turn Allocation

Learning is regarded as a social action and participation is conceptualized as a form of learning as a social action, which is widely accepted in sociocultural theory (Waring, 2008). Student engagement is key for creating foreign language learning in classroom interaction (Sert, 2017). Turn allocation, as one essential procedure to engage students to participate in classrooms, can be used efficiently for increasing learning opportunities in classroom learning.

Some scholars intend to understand LO from cooperative perspective in a wide social context. For example,

Crabbe (2003) proposes Learning Opportunity Framework under the discussion of management enquiry. Teachers' roles and students' roles in discovering, creating, and maintaining LO are highlighted in his illustration. The framework provides teachers' responsibilities, students' action of take-up opportunities and the key factors out of the classroom which might affect take-up opportunities. Learning Opportunity Framework is a rather huge systematic LO view of teacher-student in and out of classroom.

Limiting LO in language classroom interaction, Walsh (2002) analyzed 8 experienced EFL teachers' classroom interactional communication features and concluded 5 features of facilitating LO: scaffolding; extended wait-time; checking for confirmation; content feedback; direct error correction.

The latest studies are applying CA to explore how participants in language classroom interactively establish learning and develop learning to realize a shared pedagogical focus (Majlesi & Broth, 2012, p. 193). Waring (2011) and Sert (2015, 2017) show the value of learner initiatives in facilitating LO by use of CA method. Their studies expose the moment of LO in local classroom teaching.

From the above studies, we know some teaching strategies to increase LOs and teacher plays a vital role in improving LO. However, LO, as a complicated and flexible "(teaching) access to any activity that is likely to an increase in language knowledge or skill" (Allwright, 2005), it is hard to exhaust all the techniques. Since student engagement is one key element for creating learning opportunity (Walsh, 2006, p. 70), we try to start from the practice of turn allocation to deepen understanding of teachers' management capability of LO.

The practice of turn allocation here refers to the turn allocation procedures. There are orderly ways in which participants affect the transition from the current speaker to the next (Hayashi, 2013, p. 168). Sacks et al. (1974) pointed out that turn taking should follow the following rules:

- 1) Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time.
- 2) Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker may select the next speaker (as when he addresses a question to another party); or parties may self-select in starting to talk.

These rules about turn allocation happen in ordinary conversation, while Mehan (1979, p. 40) categorized three ways of allocating the turns in classroom interaction: individual nomination, invitation to bid, invitation to reply. Based on Mehan's category, Xie (2011) found that three in-service EFL teachers preferred different turn allocation patterns respectively in one university in China. Mika (2022) does exploratory research on how the teacher allocates the turn to the students who display unwillingness to accept it.

In line with the previous studies, we start to research LO in language classrooms from turn allocation perspective. Sack's research provides the basic rules of turn allocation. Mika's research and Xie's provide us with rigorous understanding on turn allocation in EFL classrooms in China. However, these researches treat turn allocation as a pattern and her research is at a university. Our research is different on this point. In current study, we try to regard turn allocation not as a context-free pattern but as a context-sensible practice (Seedhouse, 2007). Besides, we will do a comparative study between an experienced EFL teacher and a novice EFL teacher, which hasn't been done in the literature.

Secondary school education at the basic English level pays much attention to vocabulary and grammar learning, in which corrective activity is usually used to check if students grasp them. Corrective activity can be a microscope for teachers' standard teaching actions in secondary school. Therefore, we focus on turn allocation in corrective activity with the pedagogical purpose of material mode. The principal interactional features of this mode are: the IRF sequence typically predominates and is closely managed by the teacher; display questions are used to check to understand and elicit responses; teacher feedback is form-focused, attending to "correctness" rather than content; repair is used to correct errors and give further examples; the teacher may scaffold learner contribution; learners may be afforded more or less interactional space by the teacher according to the type of activity (Walsh, 2006, p. 70).

From Walsh's findings, we find out that teacher-centered teaching, IRF sequence and display questions dominate language classroom interaction in material mode. So how language teachers do plays a vital role for LO in this mode. We will use a comparative study and CA between an experienced teacher and a novice teacher's teaching to explore subtle differences in their turn allocation in corrective activity.

### **3. Research Design**

#### *3.1 Research Method and Research Question*

CA is a good way to "detail the interactional practices that either create or inhibit the opportunities for participation and, by extension, the opportunities for learning" (Waring, 2008). Comparison can be used to better

observe the experienced teacher's teaching. Therefore, drawing on conversation analytical method and comparison method, focusing on correction activities in an experienced EFL teacher's and a novice EFL teacher's classroom interaction in China, this study aims to explore the two research questions.

1) Whether or not there are different turn allocation practices in increasing learning opportunities in their classroom teaching?

2) If so, what are they?

### 3.2 Research Participants

As mentioned above, correction activity is one of everyday social actions in a material mode in EFL classrooms. According to our observation, most of the teaching is in material mode (Note 1) in EFL classroom in secondary school in China. Its pedagogical goal of correction activity is to check if students know about particular language knowledge or grasp certain language skill. Whether the reference answer is right or wrong, it requires students to judge initially. If it is wrong, correcting action is needed further. If it is right, it isn't needed.

T-n and T-e, a novice EFL teacher and an experienced EFL teacher, both female, teach grade 10 students at the same secondary school. T-n's teaching time is half a year, while T-e's is 14 years and gets many honorable titles such as "the Most Popular Teacher in the School", "Excellent English Teacher", etc. Their students are nearly 15-year-old and their English levels are not high. The students have grasped about 1000 words and some basic grammar and must learn more to pass College Entrance Examination when in grade-12.

We video ten periods of teaching for each teacher respectively. Every period lasts 40 mins. Through combing down the data, we find T-n and T-e design correction activities to check if their students master specific language knowledge in material mode: one is English expression of ordinal number; the other is how the instantaneous verb "marry" is used with a period when making sentence. Before this activity, T-n led the class to learn the words "thousand, million, billion and trillion". T-e taught her students some instantaneous phrases and told students the differences between instantaneous phrases and durative phrases, such as "fall in love" and "be in love". She also emphasizes the importance of the preposition "to" in "get married to somebody". T-n's activity is extracted from the text. The activity in the textbook is as follows:

Now look at these numbers. There are two mistakes. Can you find them?	
52,470,383	fifty-two million, four hundred and seventy, three hundred and eighty-three
100,000,000	hundred million
365,528,462	three hundred and sixty-five million, five hundred and twenty-eight thousand, four hundred and sixty-two
1,000,000,000	one thousand million / one billion

Figure 1. T-n's correction activity

T-e's correction activity isn't extracted from the text. She sets it on her own and puts it on the slide. It is with the same nature of material mode as listed above and requires students to make a verdict at first; then if wrong, students should make a justification. Her activity is as follows.

#### True or False

- 1 When are you going to marry?
- 2 They have been married to each other for ten years.
- 3 They have married for ten years.
- 4 They have got married to each other for ten years.

Figure 2. T-e's correction activity

Both T-n and T-e give students clear instructions that students should point out which is wrong and which is right. Generally (Note 2), if it is error-free, teachers will go smoothly to the next item. If it is erroneous, students need to correct it. For the latter, the sequence might be relatively longer.

#### 4. Discussion

In the corrective activity, students need to make a verdict on whether or not the stem is true at first. If the stem is erroneous, students need to correct it. By contrast, if it is error-free and the teacher accepts this verdict, there is no other practice.

##### 4.1 Error-Free Item

In the study, as for error-free item, T-n merely uses individual nomination. In contrast, T-e uses individual nomination initially but then applies invitations to reply for the whole class. The following are the details.

T-n

Extract 1:

1. Tch: ok. now. the ↑last one.
- a) ((retreat a small step, turn the upper body and gaze at the team Xia sits in))
2. (2.9)
3. Xia.
- a) St (Xia) ((stand up))
4. (4.1)
5. one billion.
6. Tch: one: billion. very good. sit down, please. now. (1.2)

T-n nominates Xia as the next speaker. In the beginning, she retreats one small step, turns her upper body right and gazes at the team Xia sits in for 2.9 secs. After that, she allocates the turn to Xia. Her turn allocation is one way of an explicit method of addressing as Hayashi (2013, p. 169) said: the speaker directs his gaze at some particular co-participant and uses an address term. After that, Xia spends 4.1 secs standing up and reads the number. Finally, the teacher assesses Xia's answer positively with "very good" and allows her to sit down to close this sequence in line 6. This is in line with what Walsh (2008, p. 60) said, IRF (initiate-respond-feedback) is quite common in material mode: the teacher initiates and allocates the turn to one specific student, then the student answers, and the teacher feedbacks at last. Here, the only IRF goes smoothly.

As for error-free item, T-e also addresses a student to allocate the turn like T-n at first. However, she uses more than one IRF even though the nominated student answers correctly. It is as follows:

Extract 2:

- 1 Tch: number two,  
((look at the computer ))
- 2 they have been married each other for ten years.  
((move from the slide to the left, gaze at the direction of Da))
- 3 (just) one. erhm:: now. Da, please.
- St(Da): ((stand up))
- 4 ( )
- 5 Tch: erhm em ?
- 6 St(Da): I °think° it 's(.)↑true.
- 7 Tch: the sentence is right. so: different ideas?  
((gaze moves from the slide to the left))
- 8 (1.7)
- 9 no?
- 10 so everyone think it is a right sentence?

- 11 Sts(a few): <<pp>yes>.  
 Tch: ((operate the computer, attention: red T(rue) appears on the slide))  
 ((smiling))  
 12 ok.so(1.9)this one(0.8)is right.  
 13 Sts: hehe↑heheh  
 14 Tch: £ they have been married to each other for ten years.  
 15 because you said been married↑to  
 16 it is a state, isn't it\* (Note 3).  
 17 so we can say been married (.)for ten years(0.3)  
 18 number three(0.4) number three.

In lines 2-3, T-e addresses Da as the next nominated respondent. In line 6 Da makes the right verdict of “I think it’s true”. T-e, however, reformulates “true” into “the sentence is right”, then utters a high-rising request of “different ideas” instead of giving a positive assessment. Although not addressing who the next speaker is, she scans across whole class with gaze movement from the slide to the left during a pause of 1.7 secs in line 8, which engages the class on the left as ratified respondents. At this moment, Transition Relevant Place (TRP) occurs, in which T-e lets the respondents do self-selection. In this case, a response is treated as normally required because speakers treat failing to respond as a violation (Schegloff, 1968). However, no one responds during 1.7 secs. Generally, the absence of an immediate response to a question is typically understood as projecting disaffiliation rather than as a nonresponse (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), so is it at the moment in line 9, T-e utters “no” to show her guess of students’ answer-no different idea, and in line 10, she utters “so everyone thinks it is a right sentence” with rising intonations, which invites the whole class to confirm her guess. A few students respond with lower intonation “yes”. After she presents “red T” answer on the slide and utters “it’s right”, the class laughs in line 13. Nevertheless, T-e doesn’t hurry to end this sequence. Instead, she continuously explains why this sentence is right by saying “been married” is a state in lines 15–17, mingling with a disjunctive question “isn’t it”. Her monologue gives a clearer explanation and more comprehensively displays the new word “marry” language knowledge.

Compared with T-n’s classroom teaching for error-free items, T-e uses more types of turn allocations, to be exact, two types: the teacher selects a single student and the teacher assigns the whole class (Note 4). T-e doesn’t seemingly intend to end the error-free item easily. Instead, she builds an obstacle for the whole class. She reformulates the addressee’s answer in Line 7 “the sentence is right.” and “any different idea?”, which suspends on the verdict. Although the class is reticent firstly, they respond with low intonation “yes” finally. Individual nomination is beneficial for attracting individual students’ attention and invitation to the class to reply is suitable for involving more students. T-e’s turn allocation successfully catches students’ awareness and more students’ engagement as well. Comparatively, T-n’s single nomination type seems to provide students fewer LOs.

#### 4.2 Erroneous Item

According to activity requirements, correcting practice is inevitable for erroneous items and then the complexity of teachers’ managing turn allocation escalates, compared with teachers’ handling error-free items. If the correcting practice can go smoothly, the sequence might be like this:

Extract 3: In T-e’s classroom

1. Tch: number three(0.8)ok, now. £ Zhang Pan.
2. St(Zhang): marry to
3. ((stand up))
4. Tch: what’s it?
5. St(Zhang): married ten years ago.
6. Tch: yes.ok.very easy.right?they married (.)<ten years ago>.

In Extract 3, T-e addressed Zhang Pan to correct the mistakes. Zhang firstly points out the wrong spot clearly in Line 2, then corrects it perfectly in Line 5. So in Line 6, T-e makes an explicit positive evaluation with “yes. ok.”.

However, this kind of perfect correcting process is scarce EFL teachers’ classrooms. In T-n class, even making a

verdict on the mistake seems a bit difficult when nominating a student to reply.

T-n:

Extract 4:

1. Tch: first one, (3.1) Guan Ju,
2. (6.2)
3. St(Guan): fifty two million, one hundred and seventy thousand.
4. one hundred and eighty three.
5. Tch: so, is there anything wrong? with the writing?
6. ((gaze to Guan ))
7. St(Guan): (°fifty two million, one hundred and seventy thousand,
8. one hundred and eighty three°.)
9. Tch: ((1st picture: walk nearer to Guan; gaze to the textbook; 2nd picture: lift the head and gaze to Guan again ))
10. your pronunciation is right.
11. (3.2)
12. St(Guan): ((silent))
13. Tch: how about the writing, in the writing, and in the box.
14. St(Guan): (° seventy X°)
15. Tch: it's wrong. yes.
16. after seventy. we should plus(.) thousand. ok, sit down please.

In extract 4, T-n nominates Guan to reply. In line 3–4 and 8–9, Guan replies well, except she doesn't spot the mistake, not showing a definite verdict. T-n doesn't make any evaluation in line 5 initially. Between line 7 to line 10, T-n uses a directional-gaze twice to address Guan to continue responding without directly addressing her name. In line 11, T-n evaluates Guan's pronunciation is right after Guan repeats. Guan recognizes she is being addressed. Until T-n gives a clearer instruction in line 14, Guan reads out seventy X with soft *sotto voce*, but doesn't stress the mistake. Finally, T-n points it out and corrects the pointed mistake in lines 16–17. Actually, Guan corrects the pronunciation right in lines 8–9. However, it is not enough. For erroneous items, making a verdict and correcting are both essential, but Guan didn't make a clear verdict. So T-n directs Guan to spot the mistake with much effort.

The teaching episode in Extract 4 lengthens these in Extract 3 because there are understanding gaps in the teacher's instruction, which causes trouble for the student to make an explicit verdict rapidly. So T-n pursues Guan's understanding by using clear instruction and gazes in lines 5–7, and clues in line 14. All the turns are distributed to Guan. The trouble in correcting practice also rouses complicated turn allocation. The following is another example.

T-n:

Extract 5:

1. Tch: now. next number two?
2. ((1<sup>st</sup> picture, gaze to Deng; in the next two pictures, walk nearer to Deng, but gaze to the other direction))
3. (1.2)
4. ((walk nearer to Deng Bowei, but with her back against him))
5. Deng Bowei.
6. St(Deng): ((stand up slowly))
7. (2.4)
8. St(Deng): °hundred million°.
9. (2.1)

8. Tch: hundred million;
9. ((exchange eye contact with Deng Bowei))
10. St(Deng): ( )
11. Tch: is that right?  
((head turns to the other side of Deng))
12. <<f>any ↑different ideas? is that right?>
13. Stu?: [(wrong)]
14. Sts: [one hundred.
15. Tch: we should say : [↑one: hundred: million.
16. Sts: [one hundred million.
17. Tch: ok, sit down please. ↑one: hundred: million. now. ↑next,

In line 2, T-n walks nearer, ready to give the turn to Deng Bowei. Interestingly, she uses a trick in which she gazes at Deng first, then diverts to the other side, then addresses Deng with her back against him. Deng slowly stands up and reluctantly responds with soft sotto voce intonation. Then, T-n repeats Deng's response with a falling intonation after 2.1 secs. They have eye contact in line 11 and then Deng responds to T-n's repetition in line 12, which proves that Deng treats T-n's gaze as a signal of turn allocation. Next, T-n raises a polar evaluating question "is that right?" in line 13. However, turning her head to the other side of Deng without waiting for his response, T-n repeats the question with a loud voice and stresses "idea" to the rest class in line 15, which means that she hands over the next turn from Deng to others. One of the students responds with "wrong" while some others with the corrected number pronunciation. In line 18, T-n invites the class to reply together with an elongated "say", which anticipates all the students to complete the sentence with the corrected number once more. This is called Designed Incomplete Utterance (DIU), proven an efficient way to elicit knowledge display in error correction sequences (Koshik, 2002). In line 20, T-n ends the sequence by allowing Deng to sit down and repeats the correct answer.

In Extract 5, when there is trouble in correcting practice, T-n still selects the same student to continue at first. When he fails to solve the trouble, the teacher selects the whole class to join. Like T-n's classroom teaching, the addressed student failed to correct the erroneous item in T-e classroom. How T-e allocates the turn is as follows:

T-e:

Extract 6:

1. Tch: Chen yuning, please.
2. (2.2)
3. St(Chen): Erh.
4. Tch: what's that.
5. St(Chen): (°sorry°.)
6. Tch: ok.ok.so.ok.
7. St(Chen): ((sit down))
8. T: (gaze at Tang Feiyue)
9. Tch: (what's it?).Tang Feiyue.
10. St(Tang): er:it is ten years since they married.
11. Tch: so:how about this one?
12. turn the head to the other direction, gaze at students on the other side, but one hand directs to Tang.)
13. is he right or wrong?
14. Ss: [right ((not in unison))
15. Tch: [it's right you can say it is ten years since they married(.) or
16. you can say it has <<slow>been> ten years since they (.)married.

In lines 1–7, T-e invites Chen to correct. In line 8, T-e looks at and addresses Tang to correct. In line 10, Tang makes a correction. In line 11, T-e invites the whole class to evaluate while turning her head and gazing to the other side, but with one hand pointing at Tang at the same time. This practice is similar to T-n's inviting her class to reply in extract 4. The critical difference is that T-e doesn't look much at the material-slide, while T-n does. So T-e seems more familiar with the knowledge the correction activity orients. In line 14, some students reply. In lines 15–16, T-e evaluates and adds another corrective reference answer. In extracts 5 & 6, both of T-n and T-e use not only nomination, but also invitation to reply, and use gaze direction to allocate the turn.

## 5. Conclusion

By contrasting two EFL teachers' managing turn allocation, there are some similarities in the novice teacher and experienced teachers' teaching. Both use nomination as well as invitation to reply. Both use eye gaze or gesture auxiliary to signal turn allocation. At the same time, there are some differences. T-e tries to lengthen the sequences with more turn allocations. For error-free item, T-e uses two types of turn allocation, but T-n uses only one type-nomination. This might lengthen the period for finishing the correction activity. However, it can attract more students' awareness and promote more students' participation. For erroneous item, when meeting trouble in correcting process, T-e nominates different specific students twice and asks other students to reply, while T-n nominates once and asks others. So, comparatively, T-e intends to create more LOs for students in the way that she invites more students into responding action not only in an error-free but in an erroneous situations; in the way that she builds more engagement opportunities; in the way that she lengthens the period students participate in the classroom interaction. Allocating the turn to the whole class can provide a fair opportunity for each student (Xie, 2011). Whether for error-free or erroneous item, T-e tries to make all the listeners be ratified answerers and invites the whole class to reply, which provides them with the right to participate in answering. More practices of turn allocation are used in her organizing corrective activity, which means more engagement opportunities and a longer time for students to participate.

To sum up, the experienced EFL T-e displays much more skills in managing turn allocation to create more LOs by involving more students, providing more engagement opportunities, and lengthening the period of students' participating time. For novice EFL teachers and student teachers, these findings can help them manage LO and adapt to language teaching as soon as possible.

By uncovering the fine details of "what may constitute optimal or conducive learning environments" (He, 2004, p. 578; as cited from Waring, 2008), this study contributes to understanding how an experienced EFL secondary teacher manages turn allocation to increase LOs in a common activity in material mode, which is beneficial for EFL teacher education and teaching.

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## Notes

Note 1. Teaching is based on material. Two points need mentioning: 1) sometimes teachers might adapt the material. 2) PPT (PowerPoint or slide), as a commonly used material, plays essential role in material mode in EFL classroom in China. Additionally, aside from textbook exercise and PPT, teachers might find out or design some paper exercises for students. So here teaching material refers to all the resources related to the text in or out of the textbook.

Note 2. But in the analysis, we know the experienced teacher breaks this general rule.

Note 3. The sign of \* means the original word is Chinese. Because of space, we only present English translation version.

Note 4. In this paper, we only present one example of T-e because of space. In our data, T-e conducts the other error-free item the same way: first nominate one specific student, then invite the rest class to reply. Extract 3 listed here is more complicated because students delay to answer in line2 when firstly listening to T-e's instruction.

## Appendix A

### Transcription Conventions and Abbreviations

#### Transcriptions Conventions

The transcription conventions are based on transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004) and amended using GAT-2 conventions (Sert, 2011) to account for multimodal resources.

(0.)	Time gap in tenths of a second
(.)	Brief time gap
=	“latched” utterances
[	The beginning of overlapped talk
()	Uncertain contents
(( ))	Non-verbal behavior
:	Elongated sound
::	Longer elongated sound
?	Rising intonation
.	Falling intonation
;	Between rising and falling intonation
↑	Marked emphasis of following word
£	Talking with a smile
◦ ◦	soft sotto voce
<<f>>	loud
<<ff>>	very loud
<<pp>>	very low
<<slow>>	slow voice

#### Abbreviations

Tch	Teacher
Sts	Many students
Stu?	Unknown student
St()	Known student

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