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ANALYZING TURN-TAKING STRATEGIES AMONG ADULT LEARNERS IN ESL CLASS DISCUSSION

Sharifah Amani Bte Syed Abdul Rahman

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, Malaysia
shari348@johor.uitm.edu.my

Noor Hanim Rahmat

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia.
patanim@gmail.com

D Rohayu Mohd Yunos

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Johor Branch, Pasir Gudang Campus, Malaysia
droha932@johor.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Small group discussions have been used in many ESL classrooms to encourage learners to use the target language in natural settings. Teachers of English will agree that there are many advantages of group in the classroom. Group discussions offer learners opportunities to practice “real-world language by debating over issues. Furthermore, class discussions enable learners to accept responsibility over their use of the target language. This may put some students at a disadvantage. They do not participate in the discussion not because they have nothing to say, but because they do not use proper turn taking strategies to join in the discussion. Some learners are better at using their turn –taking strategies while others may end up staying silent. This quantitative study looks into the turn taking strategies employed learners in group discussions. Using a questionnaire as the instruments, findings of this research revealed that female adult

learners are more prone to show agreement in class discussions and that different ESL learners use different strategies for different functions in their discussions.

Keywords

ESL Classroom, turn-taking strategies, adult learners

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of study

According to Gonzales (2010), the practice of turn-taking strategies can be done in an ESL or EFL class discussions. The discussions allow speakers to be competent in turn-taking in order to partake in conversation. There are many types of turn-taking strategies and the different types are used for different functions in conversations. Two dialogues can be similar in many ways; however, there will be noticeable differences in the use of turn-taking strategies.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to look into the turn-taking strategies of adult ESL learners in class discussions. Specifically, this research also looks at how learners show agreement and disagreement in class discussions.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is based on the following questions:

- In what ways are students influenced by class discussion?
- In what ways does students' agreement influence class discussion?
- In what ways does students' disagreement influence class discussions?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

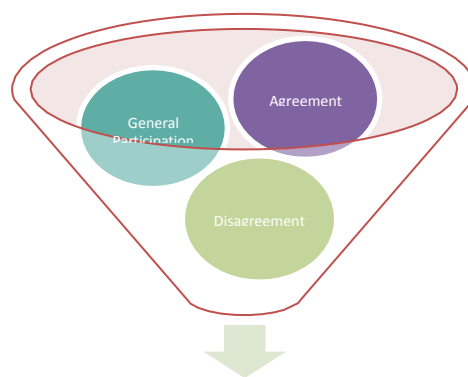


Figure 1: *Class Discussions*

Figure 1 above shows the theoretical framework of the study. During class discussions, ESL learners are reported to use turn taking strategies to participate in the conversation. This research explores the turn taking strategies employed during general participation, when the learners want to show their agreement, as well as when they want to voice out their disagreement.

2.2 Adult Learners (In Relation To Cd)

According to Barnes (2014), adult learners enter the classroom with their background information and varieties of life experiences. As such, their participation in group discussions may be hindered by several factors. The first factor that may hinder participation in group discussions is control factor. Adults have the intuitive need to have mastery and control over their lives. They need to be allowed to take their own responsibility. Because of their need to be self-directed, they like to be given the opportunities to make their own choices in education. Hence, adult learners are seen as active learners and instructors need to seek the opinions of adult learners when they want to plan educational experiences in the ESL classrooms. The next factor that may hinder participation is diversity factor. Adult learners are known to bring their differences in age and experiences in the classroom. Usually, their different experiences can help to improve learning in the classroom. Group work and collaborative activities can be used as a platform for adult learners to share their experiences.

2.3 Class Discussions

Weimer (2011), listed several benefits of class discussions. Among some of the benefits are it allows accessibility among the participants. This means the learners feel comfortable participating in class discussions with their peers. Next, class discussions offer a non-combative environment to the ESL learners. A non-threatening environment makes the participants cordial and pleasant during class discussions. During class discussions, learners are given the opportunity to talk about a diversity of topics. Participation adds interest and this helps to allow students hear another voice on different issues. Sometimes class discussions allow participants to safely discuss issues openly in the context of academic setting. It is during class discussions that learners learn to agree or disagree on the opinion of others.

In addition to that, class discussions encourage learners to practice dialogues among their peers. Sometimes learners give their opinions, sometimes they agree or disagree with their peer, and sometimes they learn to defend their opinions when their ideas are being “attacked” by their

classmates. Participation in class discussions can be used by learners to develop their speaking skills.

2.4 Turn Taking Strategies

Conversations need to be organized, and there are rules or principles for establishing who talks and then who talks next (Busy teacher, 2007). Conversation analysis, a term for the manner in which orderly conversation normally takes place. Speakers learn to take turns when they participate in conversations and they practice their skill of starting and finishing a turn in the conversation

2.4.1 Agreement

Agreement in class discussions may have several functions. Sometimes participants express agreement to show the discussion has met its conclusion. Sometimes, they express agreement to give impact to the minority who disagree. At other times, agreement may be given with a suggestion. In addition to that, agreement may indicate that the participant is able to give in to the group members' better ideas or to show the ability to negotiate points. Finally, agreement may be done to show similarities, or even as a base to compare points.

2.4.2 Disagreement

On the other hand, participants use disagreement to express their dissatisfaction on a topic. It can also be used to express doubt or reservation and to seek clarification. Some use disagreement to refute a fact. Others may use disagreement to dismiss an irrelevant point. Finally, participants may use disagreement to refuse a suggestion or request.

2.5 Past Research

2.5.1 Past Research on Class Discussions

The study by Carlson (2006) looked at "honour" level 10th grade world History class at a public school in St. Paul, Minnesota. The research focused on students' participation in classroom discussions. A survey was carried out and the data is compared with the learners' grades to see if there were any relations participation, learning styles and overall assessment. Findings suggested that the students with higher assessment scores were found to participate more in class. There were little correlation between learning styles and teachers' participation ratings.

Davis (2013) looked at adult learners' ability to participate in strategic classroom discussion. His study looked at the use of classroom discussion to practice critical thinking and

content expansion skill. The findings suggested that adult learners are independent are often self-directed. They are also rich with experience that is relevant in their education. They are also directly involved in the learning activities in the classroom.

2.5.2 Past Research on Turn Taking

The research by Nurul Hasanah Muhsinin (2015) looked at turn-taking strategies in adult learners. This qualitative research used descriptive method to analyze data. Findings revealed adult used a variety of turn-taking strategies, such as taking the turn, starting up, and taking over. Findings also showed that adult used different strategies on different situations to suit a variety of functions. Learners use different strategies to agree with or go against the group members.

Another research by Taboada (2010) explored the turn-taking strategies in two different tasks. Their conversations were recorded and their different turn-taking strategies were analyzed. It was discovered that in one group, the speakers controlled the discussions hence making the conversation one-way. The silent speakers chose to stay quiet to show agreement. The class discussions were analyzed based on three characteristics: (a) turn yielding, turn holding and turn taking, and (b) yielding, turn holding and turn taking.

3. Methodology

This quantitative research explores the turn taking strategies of adult learners. Participants are taken from adult distance learning degree classes. They have undergone a semester of class discussion strategies. The subjects comprised of 13 male and 34 female students. A questionnaire is used as the instrument. It has four sections: section A is the demographic profile, section B is the general participation, section C is the agreement and section D is the disagreement.

4. Discussion of Findings

Discussion of findings will be based on answering the 3 research questions.

4.1 Research Question 1-In what ways are students influenced by class discussion?

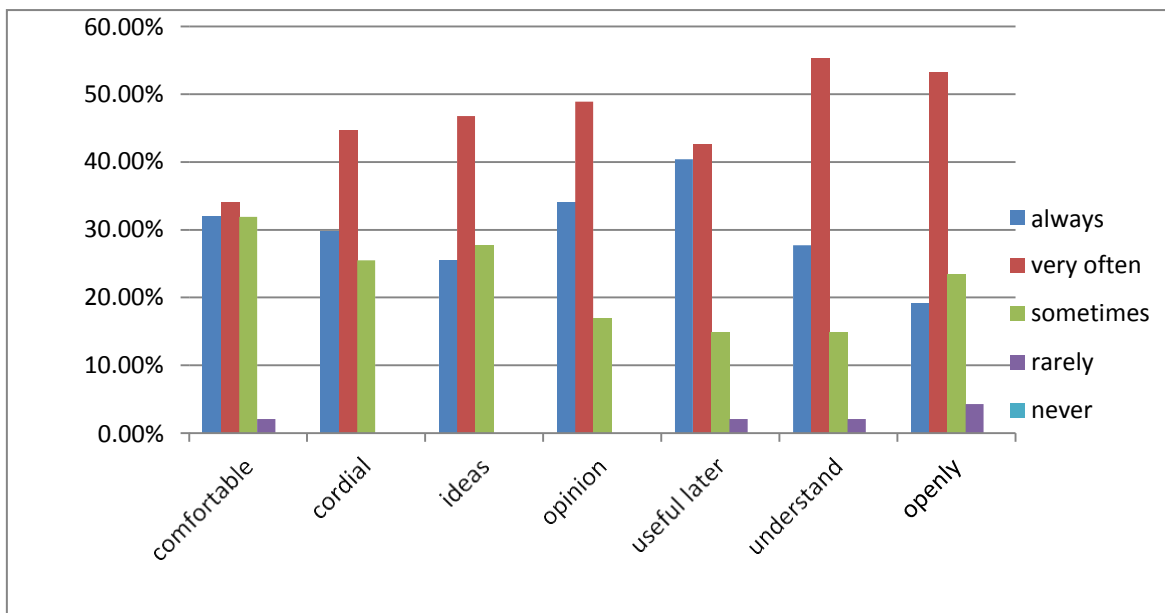


Figure 1: *Percentage for Class Discussion*

Figure 1 above shows the percentage for class discussions for adult ESL learners. The highest frequency among the participants is that they felt the topic that they discussed would be useful to them later (always-40.4%). This is followed by “listen to different to different opinion of others” (always-34%). Next, the participants agreed that class discussions allowed them to understand issues around them (very often-55.3%). They also felt that the discussions allowed them to discuss issues openly (very often-53.2%). These findings are agreed by Barnes (2014) who also felt that adult learners benefit from the shared experience, hence, they value a variety of opinions and they felt topics brought up could be useful for them in the future.

4.2 Research Question 2-In what ways do students' agreement influence class discussion?

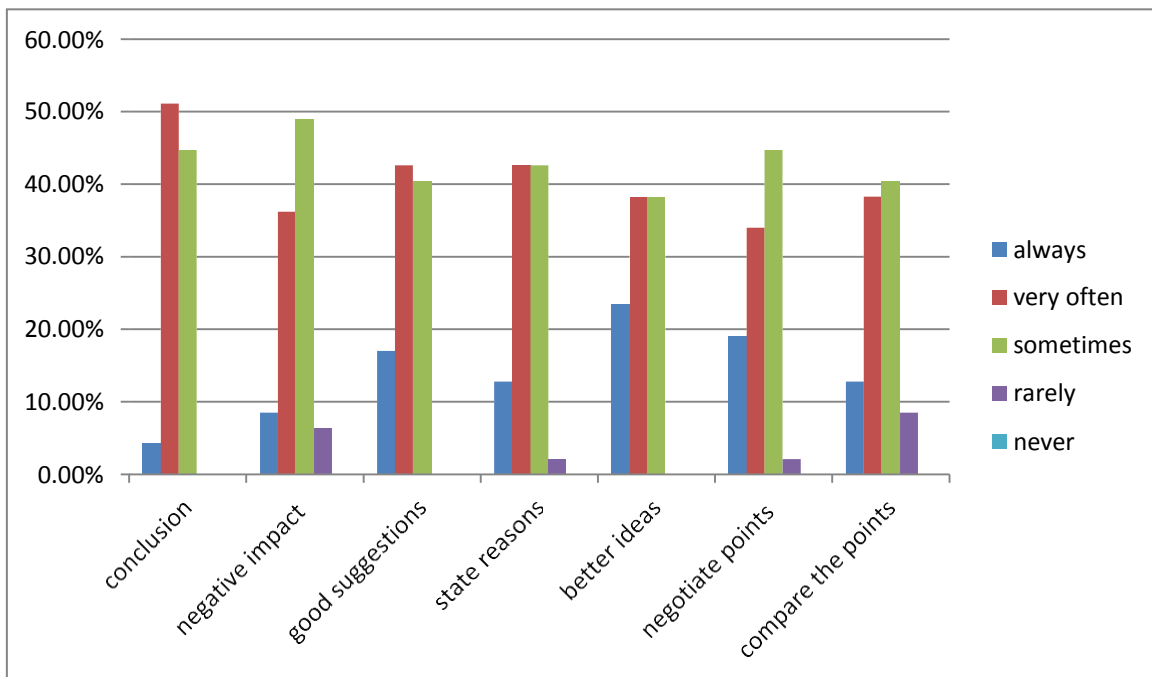


Figure 2: Percentage for Agreement

Figure 2 shows the percentage for agreement of the participants. Very often (51.1%), agreement is expressed to show the discussions have met the conclusion. It is also very often done to express agreement to good suggestions (42.6%) and to state reasons (42.6%). This finding is in accordance with the research by Nurul Hasanah Muhsinin (2015) who also reported that learners used turn taking strategies to show they agree with the group members.

4.3 Research Question 3- In what ways do students' disagreement influence class discussions?

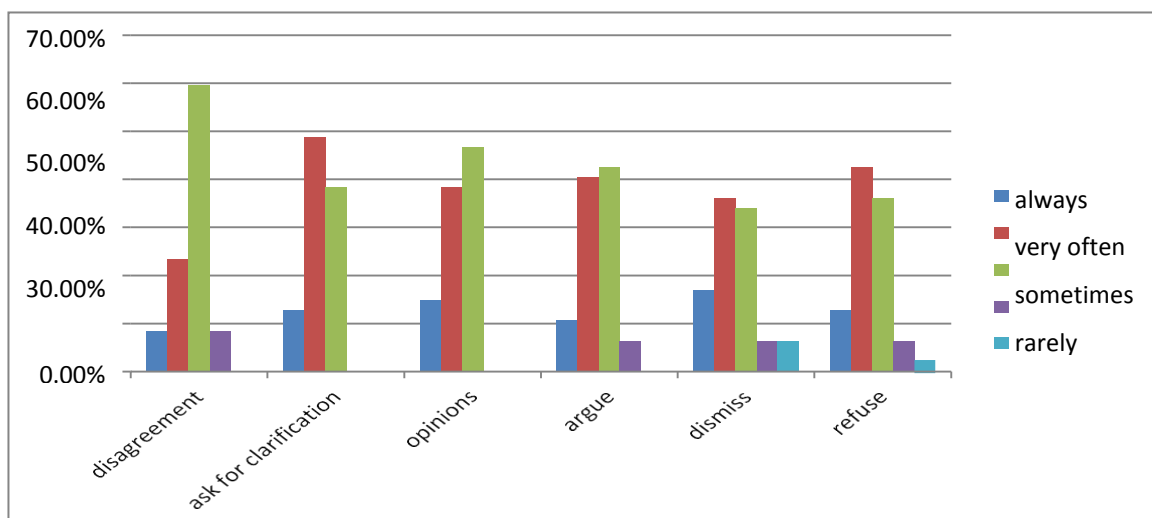


Figure 3: Percentage for Disagreement

Figure 3 reveal the percentage for disagreement. Very often, group members show disagreement by asking for clarification (48.9%), arguing (40.4%) or even asking for opinions (38.3%). However, very often too, some may choose to stay silent in disagreement to show dismissal of point (36.2%) or even refusing the suggestions (42.6%). This is in accordance with the research by Taboada (2010) who reported that sometimes speakers refuse to agree with the group members by keeping quiet and not responding.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

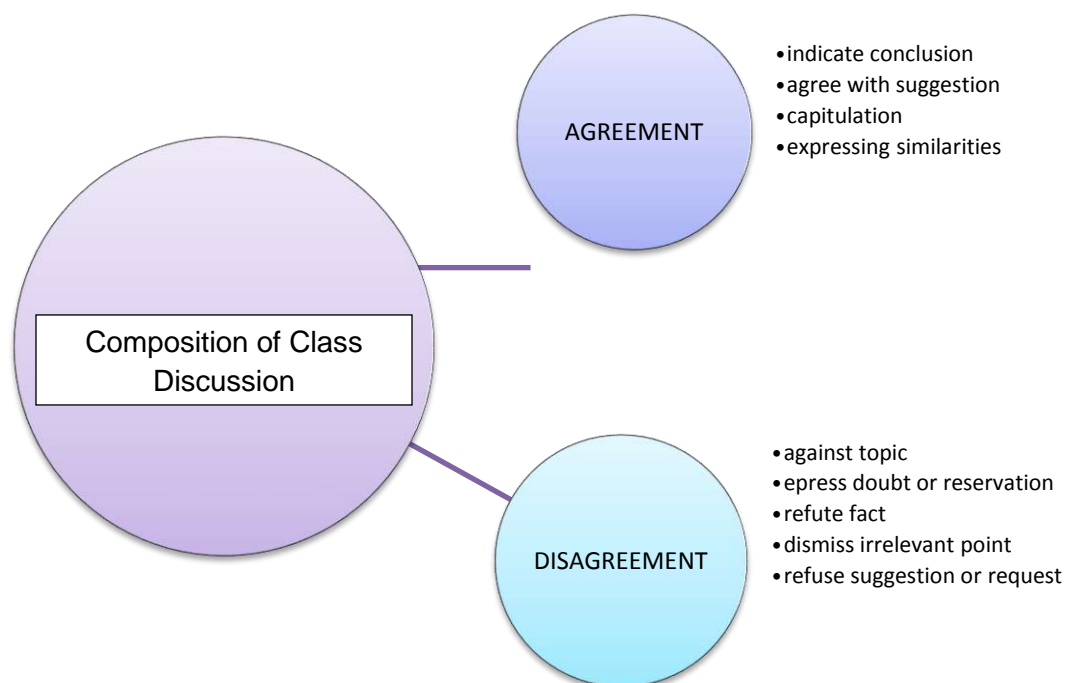


Figure 4: Composition of Class Discussion

Figure 4 shows the summary of findings in this study. The general findings of the study revealed aspects for the Composition of Class. Speakers participating in class discussions will learn to agreement and disagreement skills. When speakers agree on issues, they do so by (a) indicating their conclusion, (b) providing suggestion, (3) using capitulation and also (d) express similarities. On the other hand, when they disagree, they will (a) indicate that they are against the topic, (b) express doubt or reservation, (c) refute fact, (c) dismiss irrelevant points and also (d) refuse suggestion or request.

An interesting and lively class discussion comprises of the group members very often

agreeing and disagreeing on the issues. Agreement is very often shown to indicate conclusion, agree with suggestion, show capitulation, and also express similarities. Disagreement very often is shown through the speakers going against the topic, expressing doubt or reservation, refuting facts, dismissing irrelevant points or refusing a suggestion or request.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

A good discussion topic that enables speakers to agree and disagree can very well be the base for a critical thinking skills activity. The contents can then be used for the writing of argumentative essays in writing classrooms; In addition to that, teachers could use class discussions as part of reading comprehension activities to encourage the use of critical thinking skills.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

In future, it can be suggested that there will be research to look into the use of turn taking strategies across course programmers, or agegroup or level of studies.

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