The Effect of Teacher Verbal Feedback on Postgraduate Student Participation

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In this study, effects of evaluative and interactional feedback strategies on student participation in postgraduate English classes were investigated. The research tools included observations, a questionnaire, and interviews. The results showed that the teacher used interactional feedback more than evaluative feedback. Among 6 evaluative feedback strategies, she used recasts, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback more than the other strategies (explicit correction, clarification requests, and repetition). Moreover, elicitation was associated with more contributions from the students than the other strategies. Regarding the 3 interactional feedback strategies (reformulation, elaboration, and commenting), elaboration was used most often. Furthermore, commenting led to more contributions from the students than the other 2 strategies. The questionnaire data showed that the students were more satisfied with evaluative feedback strategies than interactional feedback strategies. They also thought that teacher verbal feedback encouraged them to participate orally. Finally, based on interview data, the students preferred evaluative feedback and interactional feedback equally.

　本研究では、大学院の英語クラスの学生の授業参加に関する評価的および相互作用的フィードバック戦略の効果を調べた。研究手段として、観察、アンケート、インタビューなどを行った。調査結果は、教員は評価的フィードバック以上に相互作用的フィードバックを使用することを示した。6つの評価的フィードバック戦略の内、教員は、他の戦略（明白な訂正（explicit correction）、説明要求（clarification requests）、反復（repetition）など）よりも、リキャスト（recast:さりげなく言いなおすこと）、導き出し（elicitation）、メタ言語フィードバック（metalinguistic feedback）を多く使った。さらに、導き出しは、他の戦略よりも学生の参加を促した。三つの相互作用的フィードバック戦略（言い換え（reformulation）、推敲（elaboration）、コメント（commenting））に関しては、推敲が最も多く使われた。さらに、コメントは、他の2つの戦略に比べ、学生の参加を最もよく促していた。アンケートデータによると、学生が最も満足していることを示したのは、相互作用的フィードバック戦略よりも評価的フィードバック戦略であった。学生たちは、教員の口頭によるフィードバックが彼らの会話を促してくれたと考えていた。また、インタビューデータは、学生は平等に評価的フィードバックと相互作用的フィードバックを気に入っていることを示した。

In Thailand there has been a growing interest in recent decades in teaching techniques and strategies that enhance opportunities for students to participate in classroom discussion in English. As Forman (2005) observed, Thai students maintain considerable verbal reticence in the classroom, in particular the English classroom. Consequently, in most English classrooms teachers encounter many difficulties in interacting with their students. Normally, when students are asked a question, they often provide an unsatisfactory answer. They may shake their heads, nod, or answer by using short words, such as "yes" or "no." One of the reasons for this may be that in Thai culture students are taught to respect teachers. As a result, they do not normally feel comfortable asking questions or giving opinions because they are taught to be quiet and defer to teachers. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Thailand; Dudley-Marling and Searle (1991) explained that in classrooms in various contexts students are unwilling to talk, and even when they do talk (which is usually in response to teacher questions), they often give short responses. They posited two factors that affect students' willingness to speak in class: the nature of teachers' invitations to students to talk and the nature of their responses to students' talk, suggesting that these factors determine the extent of student engagement in discussions in the English classroom and, as a result, the success of the English class. However, according to Nassaji and Wells (2000), the second factor is much more important for the development of classroom discussion than the choice of strategy to invite students to speak. They argued that even when teachers initiate a discussion with a display question that has a single right answer, they can sustain the discussion by avoiding evaluation of that answer and instead requesting more explanation, justification, and elaboration from students. Given these arguments, it is important to investigate the impact of teacher verbal feedback.

As Wells (1999) explained, teacher verbal feedback can be more than evaluation; it can also be "an opportunity to extend the student's answer, to draw out its significance, or to

make connections with other parts of the students' total experience" (p. 200). Therefore, the information conveyed through teacher verbal feedback should not only let students know how well they have performed but also increase their interest and motivation to participate in the discussion. However, teachers have to think about what kinds of verbal feedback are appropriate to each student's contribution because that choice can positively or negatively impact the student's willingness to participate. For example, if teachers ask for students' opinions, it may be that verbal feedback focusing on the content rather than the form of students' contributions would be more effective in certain contexts. That is, students, and Thai students in particular, may not feel confident in expressing further opinions if teachers correct the grammatical structure of their contributions. There are two main types of teacher verbal feedback that are relevant here: *evaluative feedback* and *interactional feedback* (Cullen, 2002; Garcia, 2005). Evaluative feedback refers to feedback that expresses some kind of assessment of students' efforts, and interactional feedback is aimed at keeping the interaction or discussion going. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effect of evaluative and interactional feedback strategies on student participation. The research questions were formulated as follows:

RQ1. What types of feedback and feedback strategies were used by the teacher in providing verbal feedback in postgraduate English classes?

RQ2. What were the effects of teacher verbal feedback on student participation in postgraduate English classes?

RQ3. What did the students think about their teacher's use of verbal feedback in postgraduate English classes?

Evaluative Feedback

Evaluative feedback is teacher verbal feedback that focuses on the correct form or content of a student's contribution, attempts to correct a student's contribution directly or indirectly, or expresses the teacher's evaluation, criticism, displeasure, or rejection of a student's contribution (Tharawoot, 2015, p. 59).

Six strategies of evaluative feedback were investigated in this study. First, *explicit correction* refers to the explicit provision of the correct form or content. This is when the teacher clearly indicates that what the student has said was incorrect. In Extract 1, the teacher clearly indicates that what the student has said was incorrect and that the student has misunderstood what was expected. Thus, the teacher says, "No. No. . . . I mean 'What do you do for living?' " (line 2).

Extract 1

| 1 | S: | I'm studying . . . |
| 2 | T: | *No. No. . . . I mean "What do you do for living?"* |

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 62)

Second, a r*ecast* involves reformulation of all or part of the student's contribution, without the error, as in Extract 2.

Extract 2

| 1 | S: | No, I want to make my parents feel pride of me. The pride of my parents when I graduated. |
| 2 | T: | *Oh, I see. You want your parents to be proud of you when you graduate.* |

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 63)

The third strategy is *clarification request*, which indicates to the student that the teacher has misunderstood the contribution or that the contribution was ill formed in some way and that a repetition or reformulation is required. See Extract 3.

Extract 3

| 1 | S: | Oh! . . . <laughing> Today I am an electrical engineer. |
| 2 | T: | Today? *You only do this job today, don't you?* |

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 62)

Metalinguistic feedback, the fourth strategy, provides comments, information, or questions related to the correctness or adequacy of the form or content of the student's contribution, without explicitly providing the correct form or content, as in Extract 4.

Extract 4

| 1 | S: | I want to study for PhD because my office wants to develop personal skill and I want to increase skill in my job. |
| 2 | T: | *Your office forced you to study PhD? Or you were willing do it?* |

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 64)

The fifth strategy, *elicitation*, refers to three techniques that aim to directly elicit the correct form or content from the student. In the first technique, the teacher elicits completion of a statement. In the second, the teacher uses questions to elicit the correct forms or content. In the third, the teacher asks the student to reformulate a contribution. See Extract 5.

Extract 5

1   S: I want to improve myself and my life.

2   T: *What do you mean, "To improve your life?" What do you do?*

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 62)

The final strategy, *repetition*, refers to the teacher's repetition of the student's erroneous contribution. This is shown in Extract 3, in which the teacher's verbal feedback is in the form of a repetition of the student's response ("Today?" in line 2).

Interactional Feedback

Interactional feedback is teacher verbal feedback that (a) focuses on the content of the student's contribution without being concerned with the correct form; (b) reformulates the contribution without rejection in order to continue the discussion, even when the contribution is grammatically incorrect; (c) encourages the student to talk more, or (d) uses the student's contribution to move the discussion forward (Tharawoot, 2015, pp. 59-60), as illustrated in Extract 6.

Extract 6

1   S: I think I can find the old friend on the Internet. For example, Facebook.

2   T: *Oh! Good. How many friends do you have on Facebook?*

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 61)

Three strategies of interactional feedback were investigated in the study. The first is *reformulation*, which is used to rephrase the student's contribution correctly to ensure that the content of the contribution is available and audible without interrupting the flow of discourse. See Extract 7.

Extract 7

1   S: I think we should shopping.

2   T: *Why should we go shopping?*

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 66)

The second strategy is *elaboration*, which is aimed at helping to ensure understanding, adding humor, or extending the student's contribution as in Extract 8.

Extract 8

1   S: He has eight years old.

2   T: *Do you let him use the Internet?*

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 67)

The last strategy is *commenting*, which is used to extend the student's contribution and add a comment, as in Extract 9

Extract 8

1   S: I think I can find some information for my project.

2   T: *Yes, I think so. The Internet can help me to do research.*

(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 68)

Method
Participants

This study was conducted in two sections of a postgraduate English course at a public Thai university in Bangkok. The course included integrated skills activities for students who had failed an English proficiency entrance exam. Teachers normally taught in English, but sometimes used Thai if students did not understand or needed more clarification or explanation. The participants were a female Thai teacher who had approximately 30 years of teaching experience, as well as 82 graduate students (60 male and 22 female) in two sections. The students' ages ranged from 22-47, and their length of English study ranged from 15-20 years.

Data Collection

The data presented here derived from observations, a questionnaire, and interviews. For observations, I used a semistructured approach, playing the role of passive observer (Foster, 1996; Spradley, 1980). The teacher and students knew that I was interested in recording classroom interaction but were unaware that the focus was the effect of teacher verbal feedback on student participation. A total of 30 hours of lessons were observed and audio-recorded. Two mp3 players with highly sensitive built-in microphones were used. Besides audio recording, I took field notes to capture the overall flow of the lesson. During observations, I sat by a wall near a corner of the room, which gave me the widest view of the entire classroom. In my field notes, following Day's (1990) suggestion, I tried to note events as objectively and neutrally as possible by avoiding the use of evaluative or judgmental language.

The questionnaire, which was in Thai, was developed by me and checked for content validity by three experts in the field of EFL. It was divided into two parts. The first part contained items about the students' backgrounds. The second part contained 11 statements of opinions and feelings about teacher verbal feedback and its effect on student participation. Statements 1-6 represented evaluative feedback strategies: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. Statements 7-9 represented interactional feedback strategies: reformulation, elaboration, and commenting. Statements 10 and 11 were related to the students' opinions and feelings about teacher verbal feedback and its effect on their participation in general (see Appendix A for an English translation). The students were asked to respond by choosing from a 5-point Likert scale: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither disagree or agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*.

Interviews were semistructured and conducted with 10 students who volunteered for an interview on the last day of observations. Because English was not the first language of either me or the students, Thai was used. Some interview questions were related to the data from the observations and the questionnaires. The students were asked about their personal backgrounds and past English learning experiences and how they felt about the teacher's approach. They were also asked their opinions and feelings related to teacher verbal feedback strategies and their effect on student participation (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis

From the observational data, 13 discussions between the teacher and students were identified and transcribed. These 13 teacher-student discussions (TSDs) were coded and analyzed, as verbal feedback typically occurred when the teacher started a discussion to encourage talk between herself and the students about the course content or a topic that she had raised. During discussion, students were asked to exchange opinions and comments. When students responded, the teacher always provided verbal feedback, which led to further discussion.

In coding the 13 TSDs, I used the move as the unit of analysis (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). According to Sinclair and Coulthard, a typical exchange in teacher-student interaction has three moves: initiation-response-feedback (IRF). I added one further move, student response (SR), after teacher verbal feedback to capture whether the teacher's verbal feedback strategies were associated with further student participation, as shown in Extract 10.

Extract 10

1   T: What do you think about the Internet?   I
2   S: I think I can find the old friend on the Internet. For example, Facebook   R
3   T: Oh! Good. How many friends do you have on Facebook?   F
4   S: Many. And I can update my status and tell what I am doing.   SR
(Tharawoot, 2015, p. 61)

Teacher verbal feedback moves were further analyzed based on type and strategy (as detailed earlier). In summary, 13 TSDs were coded and counted to calculate frequencies of teacher verbal feedback by type and strategy. In analyzing the extent to which teacher verbal feedback was associated with student participation, the length of students' responses to teacher verbal feedback (SRs) was measured by counting the total number of words in each contribution associated with each strategy of teacher verbal feedback (Qashoa, 2013). To determine coding reliability, I invited two colleagues to participate in coding the transcripts. First, the coders were given a detailed explanation of the coding categories. Then they were asked to practice coding several transcripts. After that, we examined each other's coding and discussed both agreements and disagreements. The actual coding by the coders began when they were certain that they thoroughly understood the characteristics of the coding categories (Gay, 1996). After coding reliability was estimated, it was found that inter-coder reliability was .85 for type, and .80 for strategy. This level of agreement was deemed acceptable for this study (Barlow & Hersen, 1984).

In order to identify the students' opinions and feelings about teacher verbal feedback strategies and the effects of those strategies on student participation, interviews were

transcribed and carefully read and marked according to the following data categories: (a) personal information, (b) past English learning experiences, (c) perceptions of the teacher's teaching style, and (d) opinions and perceptions related to teacher verbal feedback type and strategy and the effects of those strategies on student participation.

Results

Results are divided into three parts: (a) teacher verbal feedback types and strategies, (b) responses to evaluative and interactional feedback strategies, and (c) results from the questionnaires and the interviews. The first set of results is related to the first research question, and the second and third sets are related to the second and third research questions, respectively.

Teacher Verbal Feedback Types and Strategies

Out of a total of 33 teacher verbal feedback moves, 24 (73%) were interactional and nine (27%) evaluative. In summary, the teacher used interactional feedback 2.6 times more than evaluative feedback. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of teacher verbal feedback moves for each strategy.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Teacher Verbal Feedback Strategies

Evaluative feedback (9 moves)			Interactional feedback (24 moves)		
Strategies	Number	%	Strategies	Number	%
1. Explicit correction	1	11.11	1. Reformulation	5	20.83
2. Recasts	2	22.22	2. Elaboration	14	58.33
3. Clarification requests	1	11.11	3. Commenting	5	20.83
4. Repetition	1	11.11			
5. Elicitation	2	22.22			
6. Metalinguistic feedback	2	22.22			

As shown in Table 1, interactional feedback was much more common. Evaluative feedback moves were fairly evenly distributed across strategies, and interactional feedback moves were more concentrated in the elaboration category.

Responses to Evaluative and Interactional Feedback Strategies

Tables 2 and 3 present the total number of words in SRs for each strategy, with the average length of the student contribution (calculated by dividing the total number of words by the total number of each strategy).

Table 2. SR Length by Evaluative Feedback Strategy

Strategy of evaluative feedback	Number	Total words	Average length of SR	SD
1. Explicit correction	1	7	7	0
2. Recasts	2	2	1	1.42
3. Clarification requests	1	9	9	0
4. Repetition	1	1	1	0
5. Elicitation	2	22	11	1.42
6. Metalinguistic feedback	2	18	9	1.42

Note. SR = student response after teacher verbal feedback.

Although the low number of SRs in each category make it difficult to draw conclusions about overall patterns, we can see some evidence of the impact of evaluative feedback on student participation. As shown in Table 2, the total number of words in SRs varied by evaluative feedback strategy. Elicitation had the highest average (11). In sharp contrast, recasts and repetition each had low averages (1). In other words, elicitation was associated with longer responses than the other strategies. Moreover, although the total distribution of elicitations, recasts, and metalinguistic feedback was equal, the average length of the students' responses to elicitation was much higher.

Table 3. SR Length by Interactional Feedback

Strategy of interactional feedback	Number	Total words	Average length of SR	SD
1. Reformulation	5	36	7.2	0.84
2. Elaboration	14	73	5.21	0.89
3. Commenting	5	45	9	1

Note. SR = student response after teacher verbal feedback.

As shown in Table 3, the total number of words in the students' responses to each interactional feedback strategy varied considerably. With respect to the average length of students' contributions, commenting was associated with an average length of 9; elaboration had an average of 5.2. In other words, commenting produced longer responses than the other two strategies.

Questionnaire and Interview Results

Based on questionnaire responses, there was not much difference in students' overall satisfaction with evaluative feedback strategies. Around half of the students *strongly agreed* with all three strategies: repetition (51.2%), elicitation (48.8%), and explicit correction (47.6%). On the other hand, there was a difference in students' satisfaction with interactional feedback strategies. The students rated elaboration the most highly (58.5%). They were less satisfied with commenting (42.7%) and reformulation (40.2%) respectively. Moreover, the mean for all three high-ranking evaluative feedback strategies was 49.2% (SD = 1.83), which was higher than the mean for all interactional feedback strategies (47.13%, SD = 9.92). This suggests that the students were more satisfied with evaluative feedback strategies in general. Moreover, most students *strongly agreed* (48.8%) or *agreed* (41.5%) that teacher verbal feedback encouraged them to participate in classroom discussion. About 6% of them were neutral. Furthermore, the students *strongly agreed* (53.7%) or *agreed* (39%) that they were satisfied with teacher verbal feedback; 3.7% were neutral. However, 1.2% *strongly disagreed* with this statement.

In the interviews, five of the 10 students stated that they liked when the teacher provided them with evaluative feedback, for example: "I liked the teacher's verbal feedback because it helped me understand what I had said incorrectly, and what I have to study more." Similarly, other students said that they liked when the teacher provided interactional feedback, for example, "When the teacher interacted with the students, encouraged us to answer questions and ignored our mistakes, this made us want to answer her questions, express our opinions, and made us more confident about communicating in English."

Discussion and Conclusion

The high occurrence of interactional feedback in these postgraduate English classes suggests that the teacher tried to encourage the students to participate in classroom discussion. Moreover, the teacher preferred to use evaluative feedback strategies that prompted the students to self-repair, such as elicitation and metalinguistic feedback, rather than explicit correction. Regarding interactional feedback strategies, elaboration was the most frequently used strategy, perhaps because it was an easy way to encourage the students to speak. Furthermore, based on observations, although commenting was used less than elaboration, this strategy promoted natural and communicative language in the classes because the teacher signaled that this was her opinion and was therefore open to debate.

Regarding the effects of the evaluative feedback strategies on student participation, elicitation was associated with longer statements and answers than the other strategies (though it should be borne in mind that the low number of SRs in each category make it difficult to draw conclusions about overall patterns). Because the students' English proficiency was low, it took time to provide the correct forms or answers. Therefore, they had to produce longer responses. Regarding the effects of interactional feedback strategies on student participation, commenting was associated with more statements and answers than the other two strategies. Furthermore, although the total number of responses for elaboration was much higher than commenting, the average length of the students' contributions to commenting was higher. This might have been because when the teacher commented on the students' contributions, the students tried to participate more in the discussion, finding that her comments enhanced their enjoyment of the classroom discussion and motivated them to continue to participate.

Surprisingly, the students were most satisfied with repetition as an evaluative feedback strategy. Based on observations, I found that for the students, repetition was easier to understand. When the teacher repeated students' incorrect utterances, this let them know immediately that they had said something incorrectly. Another interesting result from the questionnaires was that although interactional feedback strategies produced longer statements and responses from the students than evaluative feedback strategies, the students were more satisfied with evaluative feedback strategies. A possible reason is that because the students' English proficiency was low they needed to improve their English knowledge and skills. Consequently, they wanted the teacher to correct their contributions and explain why they were incorrect.

It can be concluded that in this setting, both evaluative and interactional feedback were potentially supportive of different aspects of student learning. Because verbal feedback allows teachers to increase or reduce students' opportunities for discussion, it is necessary to select the appropriate type and strategy to support students' contributions. Teachers should develop their use of verbal feedback and aim for patterns of classroom communication that are appropriate for students' abilities, interests, and motivation. Because this study involved one teacher and her two classes, it is not possible to generalize from the results. The results of this study should be examined with larger scale studies

or studies incorporating larger samples of verbal feedback. Broadening the data collected from participants by interviewing teachers would be another useful step. Teachers' attitudes and preferences about verbal feedback, methods of providing feedback, and other aspects of interaction and participation might help to confirm or qualify the conclusions I have drawn about teacher verbal feedback on student participation. Nevertheless, the results of this study suggest that teacher verbal feedback is an important stimulus to classroom interaction.

Bio Data

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Appendix A
Questionnaire Statements

1. I liked when the teacher corrected my incorrect contributions immediately.
2. I liked when the teacher corrected my incorrect contributions by repeating what I said accurately.
3. I liked when the teacher told me to correct my incorrect contributions by myself instead of correcting what I said immediately.
4. I liked when the teacher did not correct or tell me that what I had said was incorrect, but commented, gave information, or asked questions related to the correctness of form or content of my statements.
5. I liked when the teacher did not correct or tell me what I had said was incorrect, but asked for a sentence completion, asked a question to elicit the correct contributions or asked me to reformulate what I had said.
6. I liked when the teacher did not correct or tell me what I had said was incorrect, but repeated my incorrect contributions in order to let me know that they were incorrect.
7. I liked when the teacher corrected my contributions so they were available and audible without interrupting the flow of conversation.
8. I liked when the teacher made my contributions understandable, added humor and extended what I said.

9. I liked when the teacher picked up on my contributions by repeating them and adding comments.
10. The teacher's verbal feedback on my contributions encouraged me to participate in classroom discussion.
11. I was satisfied with the teacher's verbal feedback on my contributions.

Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. Personal information
   - Which faculty are you in?
   - What is your current year of study?
   - How long have you been learning English?
2. Past English learning experiences
   - Do you like learning English? If yes, why? / If no, why not?
   - Who was your favorite English teacher? Why did you like him/her? What was his/her teaching style?
3. The participating teacher's teaching style
   - What do you think about the teacher's teaching style?
   - Did she provide you opportunities to speak?
   - How did you feel when you spoke English in class?
4. Classroom discussion and teacher verbal feedback
   - Did you actively participate in classroom discussion?
   - Did you feel free to disagree with the teacher?
   - Do you think the teacher's talk influenced your participation in discussion?
   - When you gave contributions, what did the teacher do after that?
   - When you gave contributions, but the teacher seemed dissatisfied with them, how did she follow up?
   - Do you think it would be better if the teacher did not correct or indicate any of your errors and just made some general comments?
   - Did the teacher's verbal feedback encourage you to participate in discussion?
   - Were you satisfied with the teacher's verbal feedback on your contributions?