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## **STUDENT INITIATED DEPARTURES FROM THE INITIATION-RESPONSE-FEEDBACK (IRF) FORMAT**

The article presents the results of a study of interactions in a second language classroom. Using Conversation Analysis as the primary method of scientific inquiry the author investigates the student initiated departures from the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) format claimed to be predominant in the educational contexts. The segment of the lesson analyzed in the present article is the “homework check” segment which traditionally initiates the lesson and is an example of a teacher-fronted classroom activity meaning that the time classroom interaction was unrolling in a very structured way. Still, the students were systematically finding ways of taking control over what is happening and reshaping interactional patterns in terms of content, form and participants of the classroom speech events. In particular, the students were actively self-selecting as the next speakers when not invited to speak by the teacher and using the turn allocated within IRF structure of interaction in order to stir the current interaction in the direction that couldn't be planned or predicted by the teacher. This dynamism, however, seems dependent not only on the teacher's willingness to sometimes “give the floor” to students but to level of agency exhibited by students. They raised questions and initiated discussions which ultimately contribute to deeper understanding of the grammatical phenomena studied and, through personal agency, position themselves as active participants in the learning process. Thus, it is demonstrated that departures from IRF create an alternative universe in which inferences, hypotheses, assumptions and expectations about language use are shared, explored, analyzed, adopted or discarded and it is this highly collaborative communicative process that provides second language learners with support and resources for further learning as well as opportunities of naturalistic conversation.

*Key words: second language acquisition, classroom discourse, IRF, classroom interaction*

У статті наведено результати дослідження мовленнєвої взаємодії під час уроку іноземної мови. Використовуючи Розмовний Аналіз як основний метод наукового дослідження, автор аналізує відхилення від формату Ініціація–Відповідь–Оцінка (ІВО, англійською – IRF), який, на думку багатьох дослідників, є переважним форматом взаємодії під час викладання іноземних мов. Сегмент уроку, який став предметом аналізу, – перевірка домашнього завдання. Традиційно під час таких видів педагогічної взаємодії викладач відіграє надзвичайно важливу організаційну роль, це означає, що взаємодія у класі дуже щільно структурована. Проте студенти регулярно брали на себе відповідальність за події у класі, змінюючи схеми комунікативної взаємодії та впливаючи на зміст, форму і склад учасників мовленнєвих актів у класі. Зокрема, студенти активно брали на себе роль наступного спікера навіть тоді, коли їх не запрошував до відповіді викладач, а також використовували своє право наступної відповіді, надане в рамках схеми Ініціація–Відповідь–Оцінка, для того, щоб змінити напрям поточної дискусії таким чином, який не міг бути спланований чи прогнозований викладачем. Цей динамізм, однак, залежить не тільки від готовності викладача «поступитися правом спікера» учням, а й також від рівня агентивності, який проявляють учні. Вони порушують питання та ініціюють дискусії, які поглиблюють їхнє розуміння граматичного феномену, що є предметом виконуваної вправи, і через особисту агентивність позиціонують себе як активних учасників навчального процесу. Результати дослідження демонструють, що відхилення від формату Ініціація–Відповідь–Оцінка створюють альтернативний формат взаємодії, який дозволяє учасникам вільно обмінюватися гіпотезами, висновками, думками й очікуваннями щодо мови, яку вони вивчають, а також що спілкування і співпраця у та-

кому форматі надає учням підтримку та ресурси, необхідні для вивчення мови, так само як і можливості для натуралістичного спілкування іноземною мовою.

*Ключові слова: вивчення іноземних мов, ІВО, спілкування у класі, методика викладання іноземних мов.*

В статье представлены результаты исследования речевого взаимодействия во время урока иностранного языка. Используя Разговорный Анализ в качестве основного метода научного исследования, автор анализирует случаи отклонения от формата Инициация–Ответ–Оценка (ИОО, на английском языке – IRF), **который, по мнению многих исследователей, является преимущественным во время преподавания иностранных языков.** Сегмент урока, который стал предметом анализа, – проверка домашнего задания. Как правило, во время подобных видов педагогического взаимодействия преподаватель играет крайне важную организационную роль, это означает, что взаимодействие в классе четко структурировано. Тем не менее студенты регулярно брали на себя ответственность за коммуникативные события в классе, изменяя схемы коммуникативного взаимодействия и влияя на содержание, форму и состав участников речевых актов в классе. В частности, студенты активно брали на себя роль следующего выступающего, даже тогда, когда их не приглашал отвечать преподаватель, а также использовали свое право следующего ответа, предоставленное в рамках схемы Инициация–Ответ–Оценка, для того, чтобы изменить направление текущей дискуссии таким образом, который не мог быть спрогнозирован либо запланирован преподавателем. Этот динамизм тем не менее зависит не только от готовности преподавателя «уступить права выступающего» ученикам, но и от уровня агентивности, который проявляют ученики. Они поднимают вопросы и иницируют дискуссии, которые углубляют их понимание грамматического феномена, являющегося предметом текущего упражнения, и через личную агентивность позиционируют себя в качестве активных участников учебного процесса. Результаты исследования показывают, что отклонения от формата Инициация–Ответ–Оценка создают альтернативный формат взаимодействия, который позволяет участникам свободно обмениваться гипотезами, выводами, мнениями и ожиданиями относительно изучаемого языка, и общение в таком формате предоставляет ученикам поддержку и ресурсы, необходимые для изучения иностранного языка, так же, как и возможности для натуралистического общения на иностранном языке.

*Ключевые слова: изучение иностранных языков, ИОО, общение в классе, методика преподавания иностранных языков.*

## Introduction

The present study focuses on exploring student initiated talk as the means of transforming the format of classroom communication from IRF (Initiation – Response – Feedback as described by Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) governed to more naturalistic like. It is hoped that the study contributes to a better understanding of how these interactional structures are initiated and locally managed. The results of the study demonstrate that a closer look at these movements out of IRF allow to see classroom discourse as a complex, dynamic and multilayered interactional environment.

## Theoretical preliminaries and methodology

I would like to approach the topic of this research by placing it within a larger discussion – that of a place naturalistic conversation holds in L2 (second language) classroom discourse.

It has been noted [4, p. 203–205; 10, p. 35–37; 15, p. 164] that IRF is a predominant pattern in the classroom discourse. It is perhaps not surprising, given that providing information on language structure and use is one of two primary pedagogical goals of the L2 instruction [13, p. 140] and achieving this goal requires classroom interaction to be planned by a teacher [10, p. 36].

The discrepancy between patterns of interaction typical for L2 classroom and life outside it, which was stated by many researchers [1, p. 97; 11, p. 18; 13, p. 141; 15, p. 163–164], is often seen as an obvious problem since preparing students for interaction outside classroom and, therefore, providing them with opportunities for naturalistic conversational practice is also considered a goal of L2 instruction [13, p. 141] and, as rightfully noted by J. Hall, “if the IRF were the

only practice, it would certainly constrain learners' development of a range of communicative repertoires for taking action in their L2 worlds outside the classroom" [4, p. 212].

L. Van Lier defines naturalistic conversation as a face-to-face interaction characterized by "unplannedness, unpredictability of sequence and outcome, potentially equal distribution of rights and duties to talk and manifestation of features of reactive and mutual contingency" [14, p. 195].

L2 classroom discourse in its turn is marked by inequality of speakership rights [15, p. 164; 10, p. 36; 1, 97; 6, p. 39]. Rio also notes that this kind of interaction is necessarily planned [10, p. 37].

The question is, then, whether naturalistic conversation can be accommodated within structured classroom interaction. Seedhouse suggests that the two kinds of discourse are mutually exclusive since, "the only way, therefore, in which an ELT lesson could become identical to conversation would be for the learners to regard the teacher as a fellow-conversationalist of identical status rather than as a teacher, for the teacher not to direct the discourse in any way at all, and for the setting to be non-institutional" [11, p. 18] and rules such situation out as impossible.

L. Van Lier [15, p. 165–169], A. Rio [10, p. 37–41] and A. Bannink [1, p. 98–115], are less skeptical and state that the IRF pattern on many occasions is less rigid and leaves room for more naturalistic-like conversational practices.

Such practices, as J. Hall notes, have been studied less than the IRF patterns. However, some research has been done in this direction [4, p. 202]. In particular, H. Waring [17, p. 38–39], P. Ulichny [13, p. 762–764], A. Rio [10, p. 63–64] and H. Crichton [2, p. 180–181] suggest that classroom environment presents as complex and dynamic context in which interactional patterns can be shaped by all the participants.

This is the view supported in the present study. In line with A. Rio [10] and H. Crichton's [2] research design I present a micro analysis of a few sequences of classroom interaction adapting, however, Conversation Analysis as a primary research method. This method was chosen since it was believed to allow for a better understanding of dynamic, situational nature of the phenomenon and take an unmotivated (to the extent to which scientific enquiry can be unmotivated) look on how its manifestations are initiated, sustained and locally managed in the classroom. The study also makes use of L. Van Lier's agency framework [15].

The participants which were video recorded for the purposes of the present study are a group of four female students of an intermediate level group learning English as a L2 in one of Ukrainian private language schools. Both the teacher and the students speak Russian as the first language.

The classroom discourse was mostly following IRF pattern. Nonetheless, students systematically used situational opportunities to move out of this predominant pattern. In fact, even the first segment of the lesson – homework check – contained a few examples of such departures. This is seemed rather peculiar because, as I am sure any language teacher would attest, this part of the lesson is the most structured and teacher-fronted classroom activity. These sequences were therefore used in the analysis.

## Analysis

### IRF patterns attested in the data

As it was mentioned before, the inequality of speakership rights typical for classroom discourse manifests in what J. Sinclair and M. Coulthard described as "Initiation – Response – Feedback" (IRF) pattern of classroom interaction [12, p. 21].

I would like now to take a moment and briefly describe this pattern in terms of specific forms observed in the data analyzed in the current study. It is hoped that such a description would serve as a starting point for discussing those forms of student initiated talk and resulting interactional patterns that do not fit this scheme.

Interaction transcribed in the following excerpt takes place in the beginning of the lesson and represents typical IRF patterns observed during the first instructional activity – homework check.

Excerpt 1<sup>1</sup>

INITIATION	→ 38	*TEA: Let lets check “you've got a camera”↑
	39	(1.6)
RESPONSE	→ 40	*ST1: Haven't you
	41	(0.3)
FEEDBACK	→ 42	*TEA: Okay.
INITIATION	→ 43	*TEA: “You were not listening”↑
	44	(0.9)
RESPONSE	→ 45	*ST2: Were you↓ (0.5) were you↓
FEEDBACK	46	*TEA: Mhuh good (.) Lena↑
+INITIATION	→ 47	(0.3)
RESPONSE	→ 48	*ST1: ((to ST2)) Where are you? This?
		((Loud)) Eerm “Sue does not know Ann does she”↓
	49	*TEA: (.) Good.
FEEDBACK	→ 50	*ST2: Mhuh (.) Eeerm “Dad's on holiday is
RESPONSE	→	he”↓
FEEDBACK (negative)	→ 51	*TEA: (1.4) Mh?=
RESPONSE	→ 52	*ST2: =Isn't he?↑=
FEEDBACK (positive)	→ 53	*TEA: =Mhuh

Initiation is a move from the teacher’s part inviting students to produce certain actions, such as open the coursebook, look at the blackboard or answer a question. In this particular part of the lesson the teacher checks students’ homework and initiation at first takes a form of giving an explicit instruction (the part omitted in the excerpt) and reading the beginning of first sentence in the exercise with rising intonation inviting the student to continue it (line 38) and later – just reading the beginning of the next sentence (line 43) or addressing the next speaker by her first name (line 46). Since it is an extremely routinized part of the lesson and students take turns in the same order and that the next designated speaker is known in advance, after a short while there’s no longer a need in separating initiation from feedback, so the feedback (in case it is positive evaluation of the answer provided as in line 49) itself in an initiation for the next student to continue. However, according to the data collected, the absence of a positive feedback signalizes a problem and in this case the next speaker doesn’t take on until the previous one corrects her answer (as in lines 51–53) or until the correct answer is provided by the teacher. Normally feedback signalizes the closure of a sequence or a topic. As the activity goes on gaps between turns shorten, every participants knows what is going to happen next and any point of time, their actions are highly coordinated.

With regards to the teacher’s feedback, the data shows rich use of gestures, such as nods, to signalize the correctness or incorrectness of an answer. Thus, in most cases when the verbal part is delayed, the teacher starts gesturing before the actual words are uttered and the positive feedback is, therefore, almost instantaneous. Delayed feedback is taken by students as a sign of incorrectness of the answer provided (as in lines 51–53).

It is equally important to note that by default the teacher and the students have different epistemic statuses and the teacher as the ultimate arbiter of grammaticality is the one that has access to information (which includes grammaticality judgments and motivations behind them) and the right to articulate it in the form of grammaticality assessments and explanations as grammaticality is within his epistemic domain [5, p. 375–381]. **The fact that the students orient to the teacher’s epistemic status of the participant having access to information and rights to articulate it (in terms of J. Heritage [5, p. 375–381]) can be seen in their addressing all the queries and clarification requests specifically to him and accepting his grammaticality judgments as the right and appropriate ones.** Thus, the teacher, as it can be seen from the data, is responsible for assessing grammaticality of the students’ responses and in doing so normally reserves the right to extend his turn by including an explanation. Teacher’s judgment is normally not contested and either immediately accepted or followed by a clarification request.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for transcription notations.

With regards to the segment of the class specifically considered in this study (homework check) it should be said that though this is undoubtedly an example of classroom interaction in this case interaction does not necessarily mean conversation. Indeed, though the activity involves speech communication, speech mostly means reading the sentences from the worksheet by students who, most of the time, do not maintain visual contact with the teacher and the form of participation most frequently observed does not involve actually constructing utterances as it would be the case in the conversation, but rather performing predetermined actions. These are low on agency (in terms of L. Van Lier [16, p. 163–165]) since the students are not involved in determining the next speaker, the informational structure and content of their contributions or the linguistic and pragmatic means of delivering the message. In this sense I would suggest that it be better seen as a joint activity rather than conversation.

### **Departures from IRF during focus-on-form activities: some general observations**

As I was examining the data two things became immediately obvious. First, that this is an example of a teacher-fronted classroom in which most of the time classroom interaction was unrolling in a very structured way. And second – that the students were systematically finding ways of taking control over what is happening and reshaping interactional patterns in terms of content, form and participants of the classroom speech events.

It should be made clear that the idea of control over interaction which was mentioned above encompasses both control over the choice of the next participant in the speech event (e.g. the next speaker during a class wide discussion or next reader of a sentence in a grammar exercise) and the form and content of the next segment of such event. In this sense I think phenomena that need to be considered include not only instances of students self-selecting as the next speaker when not invited to speak by the teacher but also using the turn allocated within IRF structure of interaction in order to stir the current interaction in the direction that could not be planned or predicted by the teacher. Thus, I was aiming to explore any student initiated deviations from the teacher governed classroom agenda in the broad sense of the term.

With regards to the classroom agenda it should be noted that at every instance of student initiated departure the teacher made no attempts to return the discourse into the pre-departure pedagogical trajectory. Some of techniques which the teacher uses to regain control over classroom discourse are described by Waring et al. [18, p. 30–39] and even though their analysis results by no means represent an exhaustive list of such techniques it gives a general idea of how preserving teacher controlled pedagogical trajectory is typically done. It is noteworthy that the data analyzed in the present study contains no traces of any attempts at this. This is an important finding because, as stated by Ingram and Elliott, classroom interaction is characterized by the presence of additional constraints compared to ordinary conversation and these “tacit rules can be revealed by the actions of participants, demonstrating their orientation to such rules and the sanction of participants when these rules are violated” [6, p. 2]. None of the sequences observed in the data contain any indication of teacher orienting to departures from IRF as rules violations.

One defining characteristic of most departures from IRF observed in the data is the students focus on linguistic form and turning to the teacher for information on language use as well as joint processing of such information and constructing knowledge. Another concerns the change in level of agency in the sense assigned to this term by L. Van Lier [15, p. 180–186]. As the students initiate moves out of IRF they switch from simple complying with the teacher’s instructions to asking questions, volunteering “to assist or instruct other learners and create a collaborative agency event” and even “voluntarily enter into a debate with one another and create a collaborative agency event” which correspond to the highest levels of agency according to L. Van Lier [15, p. 169–170]. In this sense the excerpts analyzed in this chapter are typical of the sample of classroom interaction which was examined in the present study.

In the next part of the analysis I will show and describe one instance of a student initiated departures from IRF that take place within focus-on-form sequences.

### **A closer look at the data**

Due to space constraints it is not possible to present detailed analysis of all the excerpts that were processed during the study. Therefore, only one, the most “prototypical” one will be presented in what follows.

Excerpt 2:

184 (1.0)  
185 \*ST5: Erm (0.3) he'd never met him before had he  
186 (0.8)  
187 \*TEA: Yes very good  
188 (0.2)  
189 \*ST1: Hadn't he? (.) A (.) had he  
\*%Eng: Oh I see  
190 \*TEA: [Mhuh]  
191 \*ST4: [Had ]=  
192 \*TEA: =Mhum  
193 (0.6)  
194 \*ST4: He would (.) yes?  
195 (0.2)  
196 \*ST5: He had  
197 \*ST4: He had?  
198 \*ST5: Yes  
199 \*TEA: Lena how did you get it that "he had" not "he would"?  
200 \*ST5: Never (0.5) yes? then meet in the third form=  
201 \*TEA: =Mhuh (0.6) [if it was]=  
202 \*ST5: [and also]  
203 \*ST5: Extraordinary brain maybe  
204 (0.3)  
205 \*TEA: Yes that helps  
(joint laughter))

At this point of the activity Student 5 provides the answer but seems to be unsure of its correctness (note the gap in line 184 before the turn significantly exceeding a standard tolerance of silence in conversation, which, according to G. Jefferson [8, p. 193–196] is 0.2 sec, the hesitation marker in the beginning of turn in line 185 and a pause within the turn). The teacher accepts the answer as the right one with a "yes" and provides an assessment – "very good" (line 187).

Student 1, however, is not satisfied with the suggested answer and voices her candidate answer (line 189). Note that the gap between these turns is quite short which could probably be caused by the fact that it is not her turn to talk and, unless she reacts fast enough, the next participant will take turn and the window of opportunity for a query will close. The turn in line 189 itself can be interpreted as a clarification request triggered by the fact that the student hadn't heard the answer provided well enough or that she believes that her answer is in fact the right one and it was the teacher that had not heard the answer of Student 5 well enough and only accepted it due to misinterpretation. However, in just a brief moment marked by a short pause, she realizes that the answer produced by Student 5 is indeed the correct one. This unexpected realization is marked by a Russian "a", an equivalent of the English "oh I see" which, according to my observations, often functions as a change of state marker. In the last segment of her turn she reproduces the correct answer (which is ratified by the teacher for the second time in the following line) thus showing that she did in fact hear it when it was produced. Thus, within this brief turn she goes from not understanding to understanding of the reason why the answer suggested in line 185 was accepted as correct.

After this, however, Student 4 voices a different candidate answer (line 194). Student 4 actually speaks in her turn yet, instead of moving to the next item in the exercise, she keeps the topic of the previous one open by suggesting a different answer. The gap in line 193 might be indicative of the "thinking time". At this point the correct answer had been voiced (and ratified by the teacher) twice. So, either Student 4 was distracted the whole time and didn't hear any of that, or her turn is actually a clarification request. At the risk of sounding presumptuous I would suggest that as in the case of request in line 62 of the previous excerpt and line 189 of this one, voicing a different answer is indeed an implicit clarification request and the reason why all of these are so oddly shaped is lack of linguistic means for stating it properly.



What is clear is that, as in case of some other instances observed in the data, it initiates an explanatory sequence. However, the explanation starts not with the teacher clarifying the situation, but with Student 5 repeating her answer and thus reaffirming its grammaticality (line 196) after a very short gap in line 195. This is followed by another clarification request in a form of repetition (line 197) which is answered by Student 5 with a simple “yes” (line 198).

Probably sensing that the item discussed is somehow problematic, the teacher encourages Student 5 to provide an explanation (line 199) which she does in line 200. Despite being obviously not very fluent she manages to use limited linguistic resources to provide an explanation which is accepted and confirmed by the teacher right away (line 201) with a “mhuh” followed by a 0.6 sec pause. As suggested by J. Ingram and V. Elliott [6, p. 40], **in case of a pause during classroom interaction** it is the teacher’s responsibility to continue talking. So, following the pause he decides to extend his turn by including a further explanation. At this point he is cut off by Student 5 (note that cut offs are not typical for the classroom discourse). In the following lines 202–203 she goes back to his original query (line 199) and provides a different answer to the question of how she came up with the right answer. This time she makes a humorous comment on her brain being extraordinary. Interestingly, the teacher seeds her speakership rights by cutting his turn short and aligning with her stance by nodding and replying to her last comment – and in the same light manner – rather than sticking to his grammatical explanation. This is followed by a shared laughter, a phenomenon which, according to Jefferson et al. typically projects affiliation [7, p. 201–205]. What is remarkable about the turns in lines 199–203 is that they exemplify a movement from focus on form to focus on meaning as the discussion on grammaticality of the tag structure suggested is cut short by a humorous comment and what emerges is quite similar to what we could have observed in a naturally occurring conversation. Indeed, we get to see a little more of the speaker’s identity than just a second language learner’s identity.

What is observable here (and this is not an isolated case), we see a shift to a higher level of agency when Student 1 and 4 moving from carrying out instructions to asking questions (lines 198 and 194) and then to assisting other learners by providing clarifications (lines 194–198) and in addition – a clear movement from focus-on-form interaction into the personal space (lines 199–203).

### Discussion and conclusions

As it was mentioned earlier, IRF patterns constitute a rather substantial part of the classroom interaction. However, along with A. Rio [10, p. 60–64] **we can state that the specific deployment of it can be negotiated between classroom interaction participants and that such negotiations open opportunities for naturalistic conversation.** The presented excerpt 2 exemplifies how students take initiative in reshaping the content of speech events – e.g. reopening the topics that are seemingly closed – as well as their form – initiating turns and sequences that stir interaction from joint non-communicative activity to teacher-student or group wide discussion or providing other students assistance by answering their clarification requests. Students take advantage of situational resources that allow for “soft” transition points (such as turn taking and sequential architecture or local silences) as well as motivational dispositions, expectations and cognitive resources, and, in close cooperation with the teacher, reshape L2 classroom interactional space.

Just as focus-on-form sequences initiated by the teacher analyzed by P. Ulichny [13, p. 740] and referred to as “embedded”, the sequences analyzed here are also “embedded” into the classroom activity that is taking place (homework check). What’s interesting about them is that, even though the discourse retains focus on form most of the time, these embedded sequences exhibit key features of naturalistic conversation. In particular, they are not planned or predictable, participants use a wide variety of communicative devices (such as acknowledgment tokens, gaze direction as indicator of a specific addressee etc.), they contain latches, overlaps and even occasional cut offs. In addition, most part of the interaction bears signs of high level of alignment and affiliation.

According to P. Seedhouse [11, p. 18], one of the key characteristics of classroom discourse which differentiate it from naturalistic conversation is the fact that students orient to the teacher and not to each other. Analysis of the data shows that the actual reality of classroom interac-

tion is far more complex and non linear. Entire sequences can, in fact, develop without the teacher taking part in them.

This brings us to the idea of extent to which classroom interaction is teacher controlled. As it was stated by R. Ellis, a classroom is acquisition-rich when learners are given a chance to control the discourse [3, p. 14]. In line with this, L. Van Lier highlights the idea that IRF pattern can be considered as a way of scaffolding interaction if it contains “visible efforts to promote handover, so that students can grow out of IRF and into true dialog whenever the opportunity arises” [15, p. 267] and suggests that classroom interaction can approach naturalistic one provided that the teacher creates conditions for that [14, p. 241]. As it was evidenced by the data, the teacher employs a wide arsenal of devices projecting alignment and expressing affiliation and creates an environment in which departures from IRF are in principle possible. It could be argued that students’ confidence in their entitlement to speakership arises from such supportive environment.

It was also evidenced that classroom interactional patterns are shaped by dynamic changes in epistemic stances (in terms of J. Heritage [5, p. 370–375] and the roles of expert and novice. We can observe the teacher stepping back as the students engage in discussion of grammatical structures and language use and students sometimes prompted to provide grammatical explanations and sometimes – volunteering to do so. The role of an expert thus can be seen as negotiated and passed from one participant to another in a dynamic manner rather than fixed.

This dynamism, however, seems dependent not only on the teacher’s willingness to sometimes “give the floor” to students but to level of agency exhibited by students [16, p. 180–185]. Students systematically move from simply carrying out the teacher’s instructions to asking questions and occasionally go further assisting other students and transforming a routinized activity into a collaborative learning event. Thus, the classroom interactional and learning environment can be seen as jointly and collaboratively constructed by teacher and students.

The notion of learning environment is quite relevant here as, in terms of N. Morita, students “shape their own learning” [9, p. 573]. In particular, they raise questions and initiate discussions which ultimately contribute to deeper understanding of the grammatical phenomena studied (the same observation was made by H. Waring [17, p. 821–824] and, through personal agency, position themselves as active participants in the learning process.

## APPENDIX Transcription Notations

- (.) perceptible pause within a turn
- (0,0) numbers in parentheses indicate silence by tenths of seconds underlined stress
- (( )) comments on background, skipped talk or nonverbal behavior
- ( ) inability to hear what was said
- = latching (no gap between turns or parts of turns)
- [ ] overlapped talk
- > < increased speed
- < > decreased speed
- hhh inbreath
- a glottal stop, or abrupt cutting off of sound
- ↑ rising intonation
- ↓ falling intonation
- italics* spoken in Russian (in this case translation is provided in the next line marked by %Eng)
- “text” read from a worksheet

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#### **STUDENT INITIATED DEPARTURES FROM THE INITIATION-RESPONSE-FEEDBACK (IRF) FORMAT**

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**Key words:** *second language acquisition, classroom discourse, IRF, classroom interaction.*

The article presents the results of a study of interactions in a second language classroom. Using Conversation Analysis as the primary method of scientific inquiry the author investigates the student initiated departures from the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) format claimed to be predominant in the educational contexts. The segment of the lesson analyzed in the present article is the "homework check" segment which traditionally initiates the lesson and is an example of a teacher-fronted classroom activity meaning that the time classroom interaction was unrolling in a very structured way. Still, the students were

systematically finding ways of taking control over what is happening and reshaping interactional patterns in terms of content, form and participants of the classroom speech events. In particular, the students were actively self-selecting as the next speakers when not invited to speak by the teacher and using the turn allocated within IRF structure of interaction in order to stir the current interaction in the direction that couldn't be planned or predicted by the teacher. This dynamism, however, seems dependent not only on the teacher's willingness to sometimes "give the floor" to students but to level of agency exhibited by students. They raised questions and initiated discussions which ultimately contribute to deeper understanding of the grammatical phenomena studied and, through personal agency, position themselves as active participants in the learning process. Thus, it is demonstrated that departures from IRF create an alternative universe in which inferences, hypotheses, assumptions and expectations about language use are shared, explored, analyzed, adopted or discarded and it is this highly collaborative communicative process that provides second language learners with support and resources for further learning as well as opportunities of naturalistic conversation.

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