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The Functions of Word Explanations in Instruction Giving Sequences / Talimat Verme Dizilerindeki Kelime Açıklamalarının Fonksiyonları

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ÖZ

Sınıf etkileşimi çalışmaları, farklı araştırma yöntemleri kullanarak, kelime öğretimi ve öğrenimi konusunda anlayışımızı artırmıştır. Konuşma Çözümlemesi (KÇ) yönteminin mikro analitik lenslerini kullanarak öğretmen kelime açıklama pratikleri üzerine yapılan kapsamlı araştırmalarda bulunmaktadır. Ancak, bu makale konuşma analitik araştırma anlayışı ile ikinci dil (İD) sınıf etkileşiminde özellikle talimat verme dizilimlerinde yapılan kelime açıklamalarına odaklanmıştır. Bu çalışma, yetişkin yabancı dil sınıf etkileşiminin dört kırk dakikalık video kayıtlarına dayanarak, ikinci dil sınıf etkileşiminin usule ilişkin bağlamlarında (Seedhouse, 2004) sözcük açıklama taleplerinin nasıl yapıldığını ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, talimat verme dizilerindeki kelime açıklamalarının analizi kelime açıklama isteklerinin dizilerin etkileşimsel organizasyonuna bağlı olarak farklı fonksiyonlara sahip olabileceğini göstermiştir örneğin: (1) görev talimatının anlaşılabilirliğini artırmak, (2) yaklaşan görev talimatı için zemin hazırlama, ve (3) onarımı başlatma. Buna ek olarak, kelime açıklamalarının bu belirli dizilimlerde anadil kullanılarak yapılması pratik bir yöntem olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

Classroom interaction research, adopting different research methodologies, has broadened our understanding of the nature of vocabulary teaching and learning. There is also extensive research on teachers' word explanation practices using microanalytic lenses of Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology. However, this paper has particularly focused on word explanations in instruction giving sequences of second language (L2) classroom interaction with a micro-analytic research mentality. Based on four forty minutes of video recordings of the interaction in an adult EFL classroom, this study seeks to uncover how word-explanation requests are made in procedural contexts of L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004). As a result, the analysis of the word explanations in instruction giving sequences has shown that word explanation requests may have different functions depending on the interactional organization of the sequences including (1) increasing the comprehensibility of task instruction, (2) clearing the ground for the upcoming task instruction and (3) initiating repair. In addition to this, it has also been found that word explanations tend to be conducted through the use of mother tongue which is considered to be a practical way of doing word explanation in these specific sequences.

1. Introduction

The research within SLA has clearly defined the significance of vocabulary learning for the mastery of language skills (Carter and McCarthy, 1998; Nation, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). The researchers have also investigated vocabulary focusing on a variety of related issues which include the description of vocabulary teaching strategies and techniques, the types and steps of vocabulary instruction and elements of effective vocabulary instruction (Nation 1990, 2001, 2008). This article, using the methodology of conversation analysis (CA), is examining the word explanation practices in instruction giving sequences at procedural contexts of L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004). There are research studies focusing word explanations within L2 classroom interaction (Lazaraton, 2004; Mortensen, 2011; Waring et al., 2013). However, there is a research gap and the functions of word explanation in instruction giving sequences thus far have not been fully described. This article, using CA, seeks to uncover the nature of word explanation in these specific sequences focusing on its role in the achievement of conveying or clarifying task instruction. To this end, the relevant literature will be provided to establish the theoretical background of the analyses. This is followed by the data and method section which includes information about the research design of the study. The next section will provide an analysis of the extracts taken from the research corpus. The last section will conclude with the discussion of the findings.

2. Review of Literature

Vocabulary knowledge is the key element for the acquisition of language skills. Teachers, especially in EFL contexts, have the potential for increasing the breadth and depth of learners' vocabulary knowledge with their intentional elaborations on vocabulary items that come up naturally during classroom interaction. In other words, their endeavors to explain any aspects of vocabulary knowledge (e.g., form, meaning and use) are considered significant (Nation 1990). In this respect, the issue of teacher's word explanation in instructed learning settings has been the focus of some research from an interactional perspective. However, the number of studies based on interactional data is relatively small when compared to the research with experimental mentality.

Chaudron (1982), for example, in his research study examined word explanations in L2 classroom interaction in an attempt to find out interactional patterns to which the teacher resorts when he is doing word explanation. As a result, he suggests that there are

two distinct ways which the teacher adopts while making the meaning of the vocabulary items clear namely: *explicit and implicit.* In the explicit way of explaining word meanings, the teacher deploys the use of L1 and L2 definitions. In the implicit way of word explanation, on the other hand, the teacher makes use of *paraphrasing, parallelism, and apposition.*

In another study, in a similar line, Flowerdew (1992) also looks at word definitions provided by teachers during chemistry and biology lectures. The findings of his study suggest that the definitions made by teachers go under four categories which include *formal, semiformal, substitution* and *ostentation.* These categories can be broadly described as follows: the formal definition of a word tends to be precise. Semi-formal definitions, on the other hand, provide less price description which involves only the presentation of key characteristics. The substitution of the words includes the replacement of a word with similar words. The last one, ostensive definition, is the use of an object such as a photograph or a diagram to explain vocabulary items.

In another study with a similar research mentality, Dobinson (2001) looked into how vocabulary explanations are made in L2 classroom interaction. In his study, following four hours of teaching, students are asked to report the words they remember. After the examination of the transcription of the interaction, the researcher attempts to establish relevancies of the word explanation with the retention of vocabulary items by students. The analysis of the transcriptions of the interaction in classrooms shows that there is a direct correlation between word explanations and students' recalling of the words.

There are also studies on teachers' word explanation practices, albeit rare, adopting conversation analytic mentality. For example, Lazaraton (2004) using CA research methodology, investigates word explanations in L2 classroom interaction. His research suggests that teacher's use of gestures during unplanned word explanation sequences has a significant role in the comprehensibility of the input that learners receive. Another research study that puts the teacher's explanations in focus is Koole's (2010) micro-analytic study in math classrooms. The result suggests that there are two types of word explanation approaches: one is a discourse unit approach and the other one is dialogue approach. In the discourse unit word explanation approach, the teacher makes a word explanation by herself without inviting students into the word-explanation process. The dialogue approach, though, calls for engaging students into the word explanation process.

Mortensen (2011) also focuses on word explanations performed in on-going classroom interaction. As he suggests the typical word explanation sequence unfolds as follows: 1) the teacher makes a word noticeable, 2) then a student repeats it, 3) later the teacher requests a word explanation from students, and 4) finally students offer word explanations. In addition to these mentioned micro-analytic studies on word explanation practices, Waring, Creider, and Box (2013) also examine how unplanned word explanations are achieved in ongoing L2 classroom interaction. In their study, they identified two distinct ways of word explanation to which teachers resort while introducing the meanings of the vocabulary items problematized by students. These are analytic and animated word explanation approaches. In the analytic word explanation approach, teachers use verbal resources such as synonyms and clausal rephrasing of the target vocabulary items. In the animated word explanation approach, on the other hand, teachers make use of embodied resources such as talk and gesture, talk and environmentally coupled gestures and scene enactment.

In sum, early research has provided a solid knowledge base for understanding what word explanation involves and how it is conducted in classroom interaction. In this study, we hope to broaden this line of research by further focusing on how word-explanation may function in instruction giving sequences in L2 classroom interaction.

3. *Data and Method*

The data for this study come from an elementary level English classroom in a private language course. It was collected during main course lessons (four 40 minutes) in which students were using the "English File Elementary" coursebook. There were 12 students whose ages range from 18 to 21. The instructor is an experienced language teacher who has graduated from the English Language Program at a Turkish University.

The data was recorded by two video cameras and a voice recorder. In the transcription of the data, Jeffersonian transcription conventions (1985), with some minimal changes concerning the research needs, were used. During the transcription process and the previous initial viewings word explanation practices of the teacher in instruction giving sequences have been decided as the research focus of the study. Therefore, related segments with the word explanation sequences in procedural classroom contexts (Seedhouse, 2004) were compiled and analyzed in terms of how the teacher and students co-construct word explanations in instruction giving sequences.

This study, which adopts CA as the research methodology, seeks to provide a microanalytic investigation of the word explanation in instructed giving sequences. Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008 define CA as an approach to the study of "recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction" (p. 14). Researchers within SLA, using CA, have investigated various aspects of interaction in L2 classrooms (e.g., Markee, 2008; Seedhouse, 2004; Sert 2013, 2015; Waring, 2008, 2015). This study is seeking to scrutinize word explanations conducted in instruction giving sequences of L2 classroom interaction. While doing so, the microanalytic lenses of CA will be used to look into the nature of word explanation in naturally occurring L2 talk.

4. *Analysis*

The analysis has revealed that the teacher tends to use word explanation requests in procedural contexts of L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004) for several purposes such as securing students' understandings of the task instruction, clearing the ground for up-coming task instruction and initiating a repair if necessary. It has also been found that the word explanations in these cases are performed through the use of L1.

The following segment occurs before a listening task while the teacher is trying to set the scene and give the task instructions to the students.

Extract 1: "departure"

```
01   T1:   you are going to listen to this message
           ((shows the massage on the interactive whiteboard ))
02         (0.3)
03   S1:   °tamam mı?°
           is it okay?
04   T1:   okay↑
05         (0.3)
06   S2:   [(°ney°)
             what
07   T1:   [and you are going to (1.2) complete this
08         table (0.3) with the missing information
           (( showing it on the interactive whiteboard))
09         (0.4)
10 → T1:   for example (0.5) depart (0.2) what- what is depart departure
11   S3:   bölüm=
           department
12   S4:   =bölüm
           department
13         (1.2)
14   S3:   o department tı pardon
```

```
                    it is department pardon
    15    S4:     [hu:h [departure
    16    S5:     [hocam
                    teacher
    17    T1:         [departure
    18 →  S5:     kalkış kalkış
                    departure departure
    19            (0.8)
    20    T1:     yes (.) arrive↑
    21 →  S5:     varış
                    arrive
    22 →  S4:     [=varış
                    arrive
    23    LL:     [=(   )
    24    T1:     very good (0.3) so you are going to depart
    25            what department london gatwick at (0.6) eleve:n
    26            ten (0.7) so you are going to catch what here (0.5) at
    27            (1.5)
    28    LL:     °what time°
    29            (.)
    30    T1:     at↑ (.) at a specific (0.6) time (.) you are
    31            going to catch specific time okay
```

In line 01, the teacher begins by giving the task instruction to students "you are going to listen to this message" while showing "the message" on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). After a 0.3 second gap in line 02 and S1's off-task engagement turn in line 03, the teacher requests confirmation from students by producing a confirmation token with a rising pitch "okay↑". Following a 0.3 second of pause (in line 05), and S2's off-task clarification request delivered in a quiet tone, in lines 07 and 08 the teacher completes his instruction giving while showing the table on the interactive whiteboard "and you are going to (1.2) complete this table (0.3) with the missing information". Following a 0.4 second of gap (in line 09), the teacher takes the turn again in line 10, and begins specifying the task instruction by exemplifying a task item "for example (0.5) depart" and after a 0.2 second of intra turn gap, he requests a word explanation from students using a dialogue approach (Koole, 2010). In lines 11-12 there are student offers from S3 and S4 which are followed by a 1.2 second long gap (in line 13) indicating that these offers are not preferred responses. After a self-repair and a change of state token in line 14 (Heritage, 1984) and another self-repair in line 15, (in an overlapping fashion) S5 produces an address term (in line 16) which is followed by teacher confirmation (in line 17). In line 18, S5 takes the turn again and provides a candidate word explanation through the use of L1, which is confirmed by the teacher after a 0.8 second gap (in line 19) with a confirmation token "yes" (in line 20). In the same turn following a brief gap, the teacher requests a word explanation for a different task item "arrive↑" with a rising pitch. This is followed by word explanation offers conducted through the use of L1 (in lines 21 and 22). Following an incomprehensible turn (in line 23), the teacher makes a continuation to his instruction giving by specifying what exactly students have to do in this specific listening task (in lines 24 to31). Then sequence comes to a close thereafter.

In this word explanation sequence, which is conducted in an instruction giving sequence, the teacher first begins the sequence by giving the task instruction (see: lines 01 through 08). This is followed by the description of some specific task items (see: line 10). What follows is the teacher's request for word explanation from students (see: line 10) and then students provide a word

explanation through the use of L1 (see: line 18). Then, the teacher makes a continuation of his instruction giving after clearing the ground and making the meanings of some specific task items clear for students (see: lines 24 through 31). In this specific case, the teacher requests a word explanation from students after he has finished telling the task instruction and while specifying a task item. Based on what has been made explicit through unfolding interactional sequence in this excerpt, one can claim that the teacher does not initiate a word explanation just for the sake of doing a sole vocabulary teaching but he is intentionally clearing the ground to be able to increase the comprehensibility of task instruction and eventually secure the accomplishment of the task.

The next segment is another typical case of word explanation in which the teacher requests a word explanation from students for the specific vocabulary item "diary" while she is conveying a task instruction. The following extract occurs before an upcoming listening task:

Extract 2: "diary"

```
01   T1:   lili

02   S1:   (bir tanesini ver ya)

            give me one

03   S2    (   )

04   T1:   arrives at the hotel (0.3) and she calls

05         ben (1.3) now ben and lili they are talking

06         on the phone (0.4) this is (0.8) ben's diary

            ((shows the dairy on the IWB))

07   →     [diary↑ what is dairy?

08   S2:   [(    )

09   S3:   °fikri de olacak°

            fikri will be there too

10   S4:   fikri

11   T1:   diary↑

12   S4:   ortak sa girerim

            if it is joint i will come

13   S5:   °diary°

14 → S1:   günlük

            dairy

15   S5:   °diary ne°?

            what is dairy

16 → T1:   dairy yes (0.6) günlük this is the ben's diary (.) okay

                      dairy ((shows on IWB))

17   LL:   (          )

18   T1:   so sunday monday tuesday wednesday thursday friday

19         now you are going to listen and complete ben's diary
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In line 01 to line 06, the teacher is clearing the ground for the upcoming task instruction by describing a situation in which "Lili and Ben are talking on the phone" and while doing so he orients to IWB and shows Ben's diary on it. In the following line (07), the teacher problematizes the vocabulary item "diary" first by producing it with a rising pitch and then requesting a word explanation from students with a dialogue approach (Koole, 2010). Following students' turns in which they engage in an off-task talk (in lines 08 to10), in line 11, the teacher again requests a word explanation with a rising pitch "diary↑" which is taken by S5 (in line 13) repeating the word with a quiet tone. Following this, S1 provides the word explanation through the use of L1 (in line 14). In line 15, S5 requests a word explanation of the target word from a peer. In the following line (line 16) the teacher confirms the word explanations proposed by students by first repeating the word and also producing a confirmation token "dairy yes". After a 0.6 second intra turn gap (in the same turn) he repeats the L1 explanation of the word "günlük" and then continues his task description "this is the ben's diary (.) okay" while showing it on the IWB. Then, in lines 18 and 19, the teacher gives the task instruction by specifying what the students have to do in this specific listening task. Then the sequence comes to a close thereafter.

In the second excerpt, the sequence begins with the teacher first describing the task scene (see: lines 01 through 06), and then requesting a word explanation from the students (see: line 07). This is followed by students' word explanation through the use of L1 (see: line 14). Then, the teacher gives the task instruction by specifying what the students have to do in this specific listening task (see: lines 18 and 19). The observation on this specific segment shows that while the teacher is describing the task scene, before giving the task instruction, she problematizes the vocabulary item "diary" and requests a word explanation from the students to check their knowledge. So, one can claim that the initiation of word explanation in this segment is not solely to do with the teaching of specific vocabulary item "diary" but to check students' understanding and if there happens to be any lack of knowledge displayed by the students, the teacher makes a word explanation to complement their understanding. That is to say, the teacher requests a word explanation from students to make sure that they know the meaning of that specific word and eventually secure the comprehensibility of task instruction.

The last extract, taken from the research corpus, is another word explanation sequence conducted in an instruction giving sequence. This segment takes place after a student responds to one of the post-listening questions.

Extract 3: "sorry"

```
01   T1:   he wanted to go inside the (0.8) center (.) but he

02         couldn't (0.4) was he sorry for that? (0.8) or happy

03         (1.8)

04   LL:   (   )

05   S1:   was he:↑

06   LL:   (   )

07   S3:   °happy°

08   T1:   was he [sorry for that?

09   LL:          [üçlü (  ) az önce bahsediyodu

10   T1:   fo:r

11   LL:   (      )

12   T1:   no:t

13   LL:   birşey diyecem

           i will say something
```

```
14          (0.6)

15   T1:    getting into the

16   LL:    (    )

17   T1:    center

18   LL:    °ders çalışalım°

            lets study

19   S4:    hmm

20   LL:    °çalış°

             study

21 → T1:    sorry↑

22          (1.0)

23 → T1:    sorry ↑ what does sorry mean?

24          (1.0)

25 → T1:    being sorry

26   S4:    e:r mutlu

               happy

27          (0.5)

28 → T1:    [üzüntülü olmak

            being sorry

29   S3:    [happy

30   T1:    üzün- üzgün müydü mutlu muydu girmediğine

            was he sorry or happy for his not being able to go in
```

The excerpt begins with the teacher first describing the situation "he wanted to go inside the (0.8) center (.) but he couldn't" and after a 0.4 second intra turn gap he gives the task instruction by asking students whether the man is happy or sorry for this situation "was he sorry for that (0.8) or happy". After 1.8 seconds long pause (in line 03) and an incomprehensible turn (in line 04), S1 requests for clarification with a rising pitch at his turn final word (in line 05). Following an incomprehensible student turn (in line 06), S3 provides the second pair part of the adjacency pair with a quiet tone (in line 07) "°happy°" which is not taken up by the teacher as it is produced in a very quiet tone. In line 08, the teacher repeats the task instruction "was he [sorry for that?" and in the following lines (lines 10 to 17) he describes the task situation to elicit students' responses. After several turns where students engage in an off-task dialogue (in lines 18 to 20), the teacher repeats the word "sorry" with a rising pitch to check the students' understandings. After a 1.0 second of long gap (in line 22), the teacher again repeats the word with a rising pitch "sorry↑" and then requests a word explanation (in line 23) "what does sorry mean?" through a dialogue approach (Koole, 2010). After a 1.0 second of long pause in line 24, the teacher repeats the word by changing its grammatical context "being sorry" (in line 25). After S4's candidate response line 26, which is not oriented to by the teacher, and a 0.5 second of pause line 27, the teacher gives a word explanation by switching to L1 "[üzüntülü olmak" (in line 28). Following another candidate answer from S3, the teacher translates the task question into the learners' L1 (line 30). Then, soon the sequence comes to a close.

The last excerpt also displays a similar case where the teacher requests a word explanation from students in instruction giving sequences. In this specific case, the teacher first begins with the description of the task situation (see: lines 01 and 02. Then, she

provides the task instruction (see: line 02). However, the 1.8 seconds gap in line 03 shows the teacher is not able to convey the message and achieve giving the task instruction. Then, the teacher requests a word explanation from students (see: lines 21, 23 and 25). This word explanation request is considered to have a special function "initiating a repair" to clear the ground for the achievement of task instruction. By doing so the teacher manages to spot the source of the problem and initiates a repair sequence in which she first provides a word explanation through the use of L1 (see: line 28) and then translates the task instruction into learners' L1 (see: line 30). The analysis of Excerpt 3 has shown that the teacher requests a word explanation when she realizes that the students fail to understand the task instruction. In this case, the teacher requests a word explanation from the students but as there is no appropriate response received from the students, the teacher first gives the word explanation himself and then translates the whole task instruction into Turkish.

5. *Discussion and Conclusion*

The analysis of the word explanation practices in procedural contexts of L2 classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004), where it's the teacher's responsibility to set the scene and give the instruction for an upcoming language task, has shown that these specific sequences bear some similarities in terms of sequential organization with the ones in Mortensen's (2011) study. These specific cases of word explanation, in which the teacher is requesting an explanation from students while he is delivering the task instruction, involve the following structural components:

a)   the teacher describes the task scene / gives task instruction

b)   the teacher specifies a task item (a word)

c)   the teacher problematizes it and requests a word explanation

d)   students or the teacher offers a word explanation through the use of L1

e)   the teacher *gives/repeats* the task instruction

Also, note that here in these specific cases of word explanation the teacher adopts a "dialog" word explanation approach rather than a "discourse unit" word explanation approach (Koole, 2010). That's to say, the teacher shows preference to engaging students into word explanation process by requesting word explanations from students instead of explaining the target vocabulary items single-handedly. In addition to this, the word explanations presented in the excerpts above tend to be verbal as in the case of Waring, Creider, and Fox's (2013) analytic word explanation sequences. In addition to such structural commonalities that have been described above, word explanations in instructing giving sequences have been found to have their sequential structures. When word explanation requests are initiated after the delivery of task instruction and while the teacher is specifying a task item, it is considered to have a function of checking students' understandings for a specific vocabulary item and by doing so the teacher attempts to secure the comprehensibility of the task instruction. Also, if the word explanation request is initiated before the delivery of task instruction, while the teacher is describing the task scene, it is considered to have a function of clearing the ground for the upcoming task instruction and increases its comprehensibility. Also, a word explanation request, following the failed instruction giving efforts, acts as a repair initiator to clear the communication breakdowns and achieve the task instruction. It is also worth noting that in word explanation sequences presented above the teacher resorts to the use of L1 which is considered to be a practical way of performing word explanation in instruction giving sequences and repairing communication breakdowns.

When the extracts of word explanations conducted in instruction giving sequences have been analyzed, it has been observed that word explanation requests in instruction giving sequences serve as a check and balance for the achievement of task instruction. That is to say, they give the teacher a chance to see the source of the problem and initiate a repair. Here in these sequences, the teacher treats the word explanations conducted through L1 as appropriate and makes a switch back to his instruction giving.

The findings of this specific research study will expand the relatively small number of studies, adopting a CA mentality, on teachers' word explanation practices in L2 classroom interaction. This study using microanalytic lenses of CA explicates the

functions of word explanations in instruction giving sequences. The findings of this study will hopefully fill a significant gap in the relevant literature by providing the analysis of the cases in instruction giving sequences. However, future studies, with a wider database, can look at the issue from different perspectives by focusing on the functions of word explanation in various micro contexts of classroom interaction.

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