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Sentence Production and Teacher Interruptions

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Abstract

Several studies were published in teacher class interruptions which focused on the instructional approaches in the field of second language learning. These studies were placed outside the regular disruptions events that often happen in class during the learning process and these include interrupting the flow of the lesson due to problems of management such as, a group of students spending more time talking to each other rather than working on the assigned task. Sometimes the teacher becomes involved in assisting a student and leaving the rest to do the work on their own. In this study, two types of interruptions related to the class pedagogy were identified and these are; planned and unplanned interruptions. The planned interruptions are related to tasks the teacher prepare a head of time such as a planned activity like games, and the unplanned interruptions involve public interactions between the teacher and the students. The unplanned interruptions may vary depending on the class size, class context and the teacher's approach in teaching.

Keywords: *Teacher interruptions, non-verbal communication, Arabic language, teacher's corrections, and teacher's repetitions*

1. Introduction

There are studies which support the notion that teacher interruption is necessary in class. While researchers disputed on the nature and the way of teacher interruption. It is believed that teachers are more likely to interrupt when students make mistakes and these interruptions are important during oral language settings.

Rose (2005) identifies two types of pedagogical interruptions; the explicit and the implicit interruptions. The explicit interruptions involve giving direct instructions to the students to follow. While, the implicit interruptions are related to indirectly delivering instructions.

Shake (1986) identifies two types of decisions during the lesson planning process, pre-active decisions and in-active decisions. According to her these decisions are considered as one area of differential instructional behaviors which have been identified. Pre-active decisions are designed during the planning stage while inter-active decisions are made during the actual teaching.

In this study, the inter-active decisions involve teacher interruptions during the learning process and these can be implicit and explicit. While, the pre-active decisions are made during the planning stages and involve drills the teacher design to use in class and the games or any kind of planned activities.

The *Teachability Hypothesis* is examined in this research. It involves the fact that instruction can speed up the rate of development in second language acquisition providing that learners are instructed on one stage beyond their current proficiency level. In addition, teaching of a grammatical feature can be effective only if the learner is developmentally ready to acquire it. Teaching of a feature when a learner is not ready may have a detrimental effect (Pienemann, 1989).

In this study, I explored the aspects of the language that can be left alone during the process of language learning and how this is reflected on the teacher class instruction processes and if this happens through the process of delivering the instructions implicitly or explicitly and using either the communicative or the traditional approaches in teaching Arabic language .

Accordingly, teachers of Arabic language use either the classical approach or the communicative approach in teaching. The classical approach involves direct interaction and direct class interruptions. The teacher usually assigns the students drills and makes them repeat a lot. While in the communicative approach the students' interact with each other and the teacher uses indirect methods and techniques that can lead to a greater student participation and engagement in class, such as using technology in an interactive way in class for example, using PowerPoint presentations and designing posters online. In this approach, teacher interruptions do not happen frequently, the students do not repeat a lot.

My main argument is that, I believe that teacher instructing students through delivering direct instruction or indirect delivery of instruction is part of the interruptions processes that teachers are involved in intentionally or un-intentionally in order to assess students' performance and achieve better learning outcomes. My point is that these interruptions that the teacher initiates in class do not have adverse effects on the students' performance but are an important part of the class instructional processes.

This study does not evaluate the product of instruction or whether the interruptions can affect the students' performance, rather it contributes to the field of class pedagogy asserting the frequency of occurrences of class interruptions. The assumption that I made can be clearly seen in the approaches used in teaching Arabic language.

Finally, this study focused on teacher's instruction methodology while teaching Arabic language for beginners. More specifically I explored the types of interruption which I identified as interactive interruption decisions and their frequency of occurrence and pre-active decisions which the teacher plans ahead of time.

1. 1. Research questions

Several research questions were explored in this study, and these are related to whether teacher class instruction happens implicitly or explicitly during teaching Arabic sentence production are examined. In addition to how often teacher interruptions occur in class and whether these interruptions are related to the teachability hypothesis. Finally, the study explores the aspects of instructions that the teacher left during the learning process and how is this related to the class pedagogy.

2. Related research

Teacher interruption involves correcting student's mistakes during sentence production processes. Some of these interruptions are unplanned and happen due to the mistakes that the students make in oral language production. While, other interruptions are planned and the teacher decides ahead of time the way he/she acts in class. For example, if some parts of the lesson are difficult to teach or understand, the teacher usually prepare extra examples or drills. I assume when teaching a language class most of teacher interruptions are unplanned and only a few of them the teachers prepare a head of time.

There are some contradictory points of views on how much intervention can happen during teaching a second language for beginners. Most of research done in teacher's intervention emphasizes the fact that students should be given the opportunity to self-correct and that the feedback should be delayed. Clay (1972) believes that students should find their mistakes. While D'Anglo (1982) thinks that teachers should not correct students' misspelled words.

Spada and Lightbown (1993) state that "formed – based instruction and corrective feedback provided within the communicative interaction can contribute positively to the second language development in both short and long term. (p. 205). It is believed that students will learn better if they are taught than if they are left doing all the work on their own (Hammerly, 1987).

Krashen (1982) argues that there is more opportunity for the students within the classroom ecology to understand the subject then when studying alone. I think that Krashen's view is valid to some extent for all language learners' levels. The students are introduced to a different structure and different rules, even with all the explanations in the textbook; teacher's intervention is inevitable and required. My question is how much teacher interruptions are needed in class? And how this can happen? What is the role of teacher's instruction in class?

A study was conducted by Allington (1980). He examined teacher's interruption behaviors in natural setting during primary grade oral reading. A survey was given to teachers from grade one and two. Twenty teachers participated in the study. The procedure included recording a reading session of two groups of first and second grade levels. The researcher focused on the points of interruption and the directions of the interruption. The results of the study show that the teachers interrupted poor readers' more than good readers when they made mistakes.

Finally, immediate teacher interventions can affect the students' ability to problem-solving. Thus teacher's interruptions can affect the students and the flow of class at the same time O'Brian (1981). Accordingly, a study was made by Mora (1995) on interruptions and discourse domains. The researcher conducted the study at a community college and the subjects of the study were three ESL teachers and twenty three Spanish speaking students. The researcher examined students' discussions that allowed them to engage into a discourse. He made class observations, collected notes, and videotaped three classes. The researcher found that teacher interruptions differ from student to student and some of these interruptions affected students' participation in the discussions.

3. Procedures

The procedure of the study involved video-taping level one Arabic elementary class for ninety minute for three times during the fall semester. The video-taped lessons were conducted at beginning of the semester, in the middle, and in the last week before the ending of the semester. The researcher intended to fellow students' development in language.

3.1. Subjects of the study

The subjects of the study were non-native speakers of Arabic who were freshmen in a private liberal college. The students were enrolled in the elementary Arabic 101 and their ethnicities were white, black American, Hispanic, were Arab descent Americans.

There were fifteen students in class, four were males and eleven were females. The teacher who taught the class was a non-native speaker of Arabic from North Africa.

3.2. The Analysis process

I transcribed the entire lesson to English and selected the activities where most of interruptions occurred. The researcher identified the types of instructional interventions and referred to these as inter-active instructional decisions and pre-active interactional decisions. The researcher also analyzed whether these interventions were implicit or explicit, and if the teacher found it necessary to leave some aspects of language without teaching them.

Accordingly, I identified within the inter-active instructions the following processes; teachers asking students questions, correcting the students, and making them repeat the sentence. The words interruptions and interventions are used interchangeably in this study.

Other features which I considered as part of class interruptions; are pauses during the oral production or hesitations when speaking and the length of the wait time. I included paralinguistic features i.e. non verbal communications as part of teachers' interruptions and the instructional process that language teachers use heavily in class and these include the tone of voice, body movements, facial expressions, and eye contact.

In this study, I used teacher interruptions, teacher corrections, teacher repetitions, and teacher non-verbal communications to examine the frequency of occurrences in the lesson and whether this increases or decreases during the semester.

I believe that this analysis will benefit language teachers when delivering instructions and improve their teaching processes. The class strategies that are analyzed in this study will help teachers to find better ways to communicate the instructions to the learners. Teachers of other languages can benefit from this analysis and can write future research to find the similarities or differences in using teacher's class instructions and the process of producing oral language at the level of beginners.

3.3. Analyses of the selected script

The teacher gave the students first a question with an answer related to the use of the past tense in Arabic. The teacher's question was "What did you eat this morning?" The answer was "This morning, I ate bread and cheese and drank coffee". The teacher prepared the question before going to the class in his lesson plan. There was a direct delivery of instruction with an implicit intentional instructional that required from the students to apply the grammatical rule and to give a similar answer following the question pattern given by the teacher (See Appendix. A).

The way the teacher delivered his instruction regarding forming past tense sentences in Arabic raised the questions that follow: Did the teacher explain the grammatical rule of the past tense in Arabic to the students? Did the teacher leave any aspect of language during this process unexplained? The answer to the first question is that the students usually studied the grammatical

rules on their own in the book before they attend the class. Therefore, the teacher did not explain the rule of forming the past tense in Arabic. He only gave the students a pattern to follow.

The teacher also used his tone of voice and made a sign with his hand that he was eating and walked around. This is another implicit instruction strategy which involved a visual and non-verbal communication aspect of delivering the instruction. It involved also a cognitive process which made the students think a lot to produce a similar pattern.

The instructional strategies that were identified in this task involved a direct and an explicit teacher interaction to the students through delivery of instructions. An implicit instructional strategy involved producing similar sentence patterns and using non-verbal communication to deliver the instruction.

There was a silence in class and the students were thinking, then the teacher initiated again and asked student 1 by name. Student 1: "what did you eat today?". The teacher walked around the class again and made a sign of eating with his hands. There was a little of hesitation from student 1 and then said "Uh, pause, I ate, using a low voice". The teacher interrupted student 1 and said "this morning" and he stopped waiting for student 1 to continue the sentence and follow the pattern. Student 1, said "this morning", the teacher said "yes". The teacher interrupted again in a positive way and wanted student 1 to go on. Student 1 repeated the same sentence in a low voice "I ate bagel and coffee". The teacher interrupted again and said "that's it". The teacher wanted to know if student 1 ate something else. The teacher waited for the answer but there was no answer from student 1 and the teacher said "yes, good" and moved on to another student and called her by name "Student 2".

Student 2 started the sentence "I ate". Student 2 did not follow the pattern the teacher gave. The teacher interrupted student 2 and at the same time corrected the pronunciation of the verb which intended to be in the past not in the present. Student 2 started the sentence and teacher interrupted again and "OK" and student 2 added "I ate eggs and cereal". The teacher repeated the word cereal because student 2 added a new word.

Then the teacher pointed to another student. Student 3 produced the sentences without any mistakes. The implicit instruction strategy has played a role in making the students understand the pattern and this was achieved through of interruptions and repetitions, and pauses time from the teacher's side.

The teacher then asked student 4 to produce a sentence. Student 4 said, "This morning, I ate egg, bread and I drink." The teacher interrupted student 4 right away and said the right verb. Student 4 finished the rest of the sentence and said "drank".

The teacher reminded the students about the main topic in the lesson. He said 'today we are talking about the past tense'. The teacher made a movement with his hand indicating the past. Then the teacher said a few verbs in English like ate, drunk. I think it is important always to keep the students in the same track and remind them about the main subject in class.

Student 5 produced another sentence, but the order in the class was interrupted for a second. The teacher was talking to someone while student 5 produced the sentence "This morning, I ate bread". The teacher was paying a little attention to student 5 and the teacher remembered only, "This morning I ate" so student 5 repeated his sentence again. This time instead of saying, "I ate bread and cheese", student 5 said, "I ate bread with cheese". The teacher said, "Good". Student 5 changed the preposition. The teacher made student 5 repeats the sentence because he was not paying attention.

Student 6 said, "This morning, I ate pastry, I ate coffee". The teacher said in English "What's that?" The teacher did not understand the way the student 6 said the word "pastry" in Arabic. Therefore, the teacher went and looked at student's 6 notebooks and read the word. The

teacher corrected student's 6 pronunciation of the word "pastry" because he made a mistake in pronouncing some sounds of the word "pastry". The teacher also corrected the verb used with the word "coffee". Student 6 used the verb "ate" instead of using the verb "drank". The teacher made the student repeat the phrase "I drank coffee". Student 6 had used Arabic vocabulary item that was learned previously, although student 6 did not know how to pronounce the word "pastry" correctly. The teacher did not ask student 6 to give him the meaning of the word in English. The teacher just checked it himself in the student's notebook. The teacher smiled and was pleased when student 6 used a new vocabulary item that none of the students had used so far, when he gave them the pattern.

Then, the teacher pointed to another student 7. Student 7 said, "This morning....". The teacher interrupted and repeated the phrase "This morning" to reinforce the phrase. Student 7 said "This morning I ate bread and cheese". The teacher said "Good...Yes". In this example, the teacher reinforced the phrase "This morning". The teacher wanted to remind the students of the pattern he gave them.

Another student 8 gave this sentence: "This morning, not eat". The teacher corrected the negation by saying "I did not" and said, "Good". Student 8 indicated not having eating anything for breakfast.

The teacher gave student 8 a correct way in negating the past tense verb in Arabic. He did not explain to her the grammatical rule. The teacher asked student 8 in English "**You did not eat anything?**". Student 8 did not understand why the teacher asked her "**why**". The teacher explained why he asked the question because he wanted to know if student 8 was sick. The student seemed very confused with his questions. The teacher moved on by saying, "OK". The teacher did want to spend more time on that so he pointed to another student. In this example, student 8 did not follow the pattern. Student 8 gave the teacher a new pattern.

Then, it was student 9 turns. Student 9 forgot the pattern and said, "What?". The teacher interrupted student 9 in English immediately "You say", and then the teacher said in Arabic, "This morning". Student 9 said, "This morning, I ate bread. The teacher interrupted again, correcting her pronunciation of the words because student 9 used a different short vowel with the verb "ate" in the sentence, "I ate bread and..". Student 9 repeated the sentence "This morning, I ate bread and coffee". The teacher interrupted her again and said "drank coffee". Student 9 forgot to use the verb "drank" with the word "coffee".

In this instance, the teacher interrupted student 9 right away and made the student produce the pattern. The interruption was direct because the teacher switched to English. The teacher interrupted again wanting student 9 to give a full sentence by saying "and". Student 9 repeated the phrase and gave the teacher a full sentence. Student 9 understood that the teacher wanted more. The teacher's tone of voice helped student 9 understands that the teacher wanted her to produce the sentence.

The interruption process can involve paralinguistic features like using different intonation, movement of hands, and facial expressions such as moving the, lips, nodding the head, and eye contact. I consider paralinguistic features that were used in class as part of teacher indirect and direct interruptions. These hints the teacher used in class to clarify information and to answer questions are non-verbal communication tools.

I want to emphasize the fact that the wait time can affect students' sentence production. The teacher spent a few minutes with the student 9 and it was clear the teacher wanted to move quickly to another student.

The last student 10 has delivered a completely accurate sentence by saying, “This morning I ate eggs and bread”. The teacher said, “Good”. The teacher repeated the same sentence to reinforce his pattern. Then the teacher went back to his desk and looked at his lesson plan.

In summary, interruptions occurred repeatedly through teacher prompting and were achieved through the pattern the teacher presented. Using a pattern and making the students follow it resulted in many direct interventions from the teacher side through giving direct interactions to the students. These led to different kind of involvements from the teacher such as: interrupting very quickly, holding off, repeating, switching between English and Arabic. These repetitions were part of the class process and happened as the situation demanded, and were used to the extent to which the teacher was certain the students learn the pattern.

The time to accomplish the task took twenty five minutes and this included all the interactions between the teacher and the students during the learning process. The teacher made all the students participate in the task and moved quickly from one student to another. I found his way of approaching the subject very helpful especially focusing on time as one of the factors that could contribute to the process of oral sentence production.

As I have explained earlier, the word order of Arabic sentences differs from English. The teacher made the students follow the pattern he gave them which involved the accusative sentence type in Arabic, focusing on the verb in the past tense and taking into consideration the type of the diacritic associated with the verb in the past tense. I have stated also the types of interruption that occurred during the learning process. The teacher intervened directly and interrupted the students quickly and made them repeat the correct answer. The processes that reflected interruptions during the teacher-student interaction were repetitions, and corrections. Finally, the answer to the second question is that it appeared that the teacher focused on the pattern he designed, and what was left out, was encouraging the students to come up with new patterns and new sentences.

3.4. Analysis of data

Table one shows the strategies and processes the teacher used in class and these are interruptions, corrections, repetitions, and non-verbal communication. The table also shows the number of students who were involved in the task the letter (S) refers to the students; the (F) refers to female and (M) males. The numbers in each line indicate teacher’s interruptions, teacher’s repetitions, teacher’s corrections, and non-verbal communication for each student. These numbers in the table shows the frequency of occurrences in class.

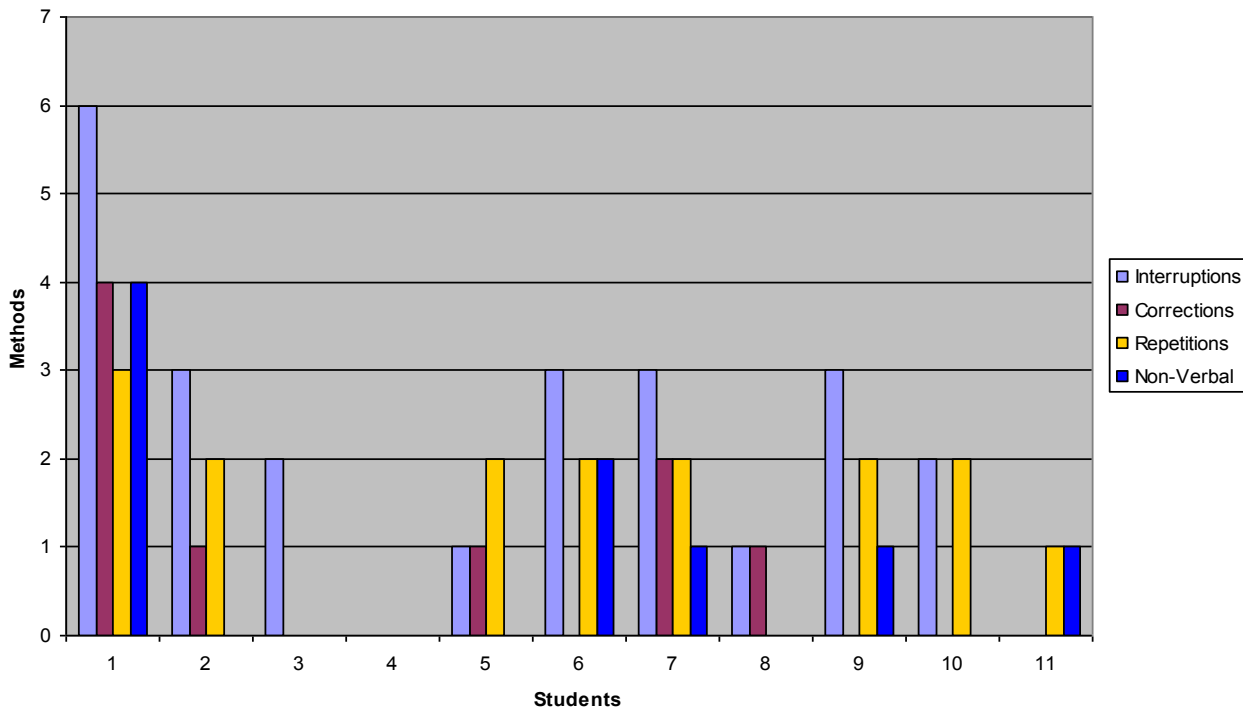
Table 1 A Summary of Teacher Class Strategies and Processes

Methods	Fr	S1 F	S2 F	S3 F	S4 M	S5 M	S6 M	S7 F	S8 F	S9 F	S10 F	Total
Interruptions	6	3	2	0	1	3	3	1	3	2	0	24
Corrections	4	1			1		2	1				9
Repetitions	3	2		1	2	2	2		2	2	1	16
Non-Verbal	4					2	1		1		1	9

3.5. Analysis of chart

In the chart there are different columns which represent the processes and the strategies used in class. The light blue columns refer to the frequency of teacher interruptions in class. The red columns refer to the frequency of teacher corrections in class. The yellow columns involve the frequency of teacher repetitions in class. Finally, the dark blue columns involve the frequency of teacher non-verbal communications in class. The heights of columns indicate the amount of interruptions or corrections. It appeared from the chart, teacher interruptions, corrections, repetitions, and non-verbal communication decreased a lot at the end of the activity.

Chart 1 Summary of Teacher Class Strategies



4. Conclusions

The process of sentences production in Arabic can be achieved implicitly and explicitly through teacher class interruptions which I consider as an essential part of teacher class pedagogy. These interruptions are related to unplanned instructions. Teacher interruptions involve cognitive processes to produce similar structures and these included non-verbal communications that played a major role in the sentence production. Sentence production is related to the teachability of language where the delivery of instruction can develop learners' ability in acquiring the language. It is important to understand how the process of sentence production can be accomplished in Arabic and learn about some of the strategies the teacher can use. It is clear that most of the teacher class instruction in this study happened explicitly with implicit intention that was achieved through repetitions, corrections, non-verbal communications, pauses, and wait time where the teacher's initiated all the time.

The teachability hypothesis was examined in relation to class instructions and class interruptions. In terms of class instruction the teacher did not explain to class the rule of forming the past tense in Arabic, rather than he focused on sentence structure through using a pattern. In terms of class interruption, the teacher focused on the pattern he designed, and what was left out was encouraging the students to come up with their own patterns. Giving the students a pattern to follow made them acquire the formation of the sentences in the past. The pattern speeded up the rate of development of the language structure. But the learners were not instructed on a stage which was beyond their current proficiency level. (Chart 1)

At certain points of language development the students need to produce new sentences rather than having them produce the same pattern. There was only one instance when the teacher accepted the student's sentence where a slightly different pattern was produced.

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Appendix 1. The main script

Teacher: Good, take a paper, I will ask you a question first. What did you (he/she) eat this morning? I ate bread and cheese and drank coffee this morning. This morning, I ate bread and cheese and drank coffee. [The teacher pointed to himself with his hands and was counting what he ate with his hand.]

Teacher: Student 1 F, what did you eat this morning? [Walking around and imitating with his hands an eating motion.]

Student 1: Uh..I ate...[There was a short pause the student said in a low voice.]

Teacher: This morning [Interrupting her because he apparently wanted Sally to follow the pattern.]

Student 1 F: This morning. [There was a short pause.]

Teacher: Yes [Prompt to go on.]

Student 1: I ate bagel and coffee. [Repeating again in a low voice.]

Teacher: That's it?[Meaning "that's all you ate?"] Yes. Good.

Teacher: Student 1. [The teacher was asking some students by their names to give him a sentence.]

Student 2 F: I ate. [Student 2 does not follow the pattern the teacher wants the student to use "This morning" at the beginning of the sentence.]

Teacher: This morning, I ate [Interrupting and correcting the pronunciation of the verb because in Arabic certain diacritics are used with the verb to represent the short vowels that are usually associated with verbs in different timing. In Arabic the pronoun is attached to the verb unlike the English. Therefore "I ate" is formed as one word in Arabic, not two words as in English and the diacritic is placed above the verb represent the pronoun implicit in the structure of the verb in the past tense.]

Student 3 F: This morning, OK, I ate eggs and cereal.

Teacher: And cereal...yes. Good [Repeating and pointing to another student for him to give a sentence.]

Teacher repeated: This morning, I ate cereal and drank coffee [Pointing to another student to give him a sentence.]

Teacher: Yes. Good. [Moving to another student.]

Student 4 M: This morning, I ate eggs, bread and I drink.

Teacher: I drank [Interrupting and correcting the form of the verb because Kevin used the present tense of the verb "drink" instead of following the pattern given by the teacher and using the past tense.]

Student 5 M: I drank coffee with milk and sugar.

Teacher: Sugar. Good. [Repeating the word to reinforce it.]

Teacher: **So because we are today talking** [The teacher used English to remind the students of the past tense and made a sign with his hand back over his shoulder to indicate the past tense].

Teacher: **We are using drank, ate... Ok.** Yes. **Wait a minute.** [The teacher interrupts himself to talk to me as I was videotaping, there is a pause.] Yes.

Student 6 M: This morning, I ate bread and cheese. [The teacher did pay attention to student 6 while producing the sentence because the teacher was talking to me.]

Teacher: Yes... This morning I ate [The teacher interrupts and motioning with his hand, indicates that he wants student 6 to repeat his sentence again.]

Student 6 M : This morning I ate bread with cheese.

Teacher: Good [The teacher looked at Student 7 F and nodded his head and Student 7 understood that he has to produce a sentence.]

Student 7 M: This morning, I ate pastry.

Teacher: **What's that?** [The teacher uses English because he did not understand the word Paul used in his sentence, then the teacher goes over to read the word Paul wrote in his notebook.]

Teacher: Pastry. Yes. Good. [Smiling.]

Student 7 : I ate pastry and I ate coffee.

Teacher: Drank coffee. [Correcting Student 8 because he used the wrong verb "ate" with the word "coffee" instead of "drink".]

Teacher: Yes. Good. [Pointing to another student to produce a sentence.]

Student 8 F: This morning, Teacher: This morning [Correcting the pronunciation of "This" because she used a different diacritical marker for the short vowel.]

Student 8: This morning I eat bread and cheese.

Teacher: Good. Yes. [The teacher wanted another student to participate and said "Yes" he was waiting to hear another sentence.]

Student 8 F: This morning, not eat. [Student 10 did not negate the verb correctly. Negation in Arabic differs from English, different particles are used for example; (**Ma**) is used to negate past tense verbs, and must be directly followed by the past tense verb.]

Teacher: I did not. Good [Interrupting and giving the correct negation form because negation had not yet been explained in class.]

Teacher: **You did not eat anything?** [Smiling and questioning student 8 in English.] Why?

Student 8: I do not know [the student does not understand the teacher's question, there is a long pause.]

Teacher: **Say it in English, it is fine. You did not eat this morning right? I asked you why?**[The teacher is nodding his head and requesting for more information about her not having had breakfast.]

Student 8: **I just did not eat.**

Teacher: Were you sick? OK [The teacher pointed to another student to produce a sentence in Arabic.]

Student 9 F: What...[The student forgot the pattern which the teacher had given them which starts with "This morning" she uses another word which has no relation to the phrase that she is supposed to use.]

Teacher: **You say**, "This morning". [Interrupting the student in English and telling her to use the phrase "this morning"].

Student 9: This morning I ate bread.

Teacher: I ate bread and [Correcting the pronunciation of the verb, the student used the wrong short vowel.]

Student 10 F: I ate bread and tea.

Teacher: Good, drank tea.... Yes. [Stressing the use of the verb "drank" with the word tea.]

Student 10 F: This morning, I eat eggs and bread.

Teacher: Good. I ate an egg and bread [Reinforcing the sentence again by repeating it.] [The teacher went back to his desk and looked at his lesson plan.]