Exploring the Assumptions that Underlie Knowledge Elicitation in Classroom Interaction

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ABSTRACT. From a conversation analytic perspective, this paper explores the assumptions underlying the elicitation of knowledge display, in particular relation to an elicitation method. It begins with the classification of elicitation methods into the opening up and limiting methods, depending on whether teachers open up the opportunity to answer to all students, or limit it to one at a time. Based on the premise that teachers have certain expectation about the cohort’s access to a required answer and that this expectation is tied to how the answer is elicited, the paper focuses on evidencing the correlation between teachers’ answer anticipation and the use of an elicitation method, particularly, the opening up method. The examination of 12 video-recorded Korean primary school EFL classes suggests that the opening up method is used, conveying varying levels of teachers’ answer anticipation, expressed on a continuum of ‘only a few, possibly none of the cohort, can answer’ anticipation at one end and ‘all can answer’ anticipation at the other. This suggests that the opening up method is the default mode of elicitation reflective of all levels of answer anticipation, which is contrasted to the limiting method skewed toward one end of the continuum.

Key words: Question-answer sequences, Knowledge elicitation, EFL, Conversation analysis

I. Introduction

Teachers elicit students’ knowledge display by asking questions. In doing so, they largely address the class as a whole rather than directing questions to a selected student, at least in the setting of the current investigation—Korean primary school EFL classrooms. An observation shows that such unaddressed questions largely develop into two sequential patterns, depending on whether teachers open up the opportunity to answer to all students, or limit it to one at a time. Opening up an opportunity to all invites anyone to answer if they can (as well as if they wish), which often results in a choral response as in excerpt (1); alternatively, the limiting method confines the opportunity to answer to one student, who is specified through a nomination process as in excerpt (2), where the teacher raises her hand at line 6, inviting students to bid for a turn to answer alone.

Excerpt (1)
1 T: Who is this?
2 Ss: Vincent.

Excerpt (2)
5 T: Do you know the answer? Anyone, do you know the answer? 
6 [[[raises a hand]]]
7 S: [[[a hand up shown on the video]]]
8 (1.5) ((students raise hand))
10 T: Nass.
11 ()
12 T: What’s the answer?
13 N: (Birthday party).

Teachers switch back and forth between these two elicitation methods, which I call the opening up and limiting methods, respectively. This paper is based on the premise that teachers have certain expectation about the cohort’s access to a required answer and that this expectation is tied to how the answer is elicited. Despite increasing conversation analytic (CA) research on how teachers keenly orient to students’ epistemic states, no study has explored how it may be related to the way they elicit an answer (see the next section for discussion). Recognizing the need to fill this gap, this paper examines how teachers’ assumptions about students’ epistemic access are manifested through the unfolding talk; it specifically focuses on the instances where the opening up method is used. Based on this examination, it will be shown that the opening up method can be distinguished from its alternative, the limiting method.
II. Background

The social distribution of knowledge between speakers is an oriented-to feature reflected in various dimensions of human interaction (e.g., Goodwin, 1979; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011). Heritage (2012a, 2012b) proposed that speakers hold a certain epistemic status, which refers to their positioning relative to others in terms of rights, responsibilities, and obligations within some domain of knowledge; in light of their epistemic status, speakers display a particular epistemic stance. In question-answer sequences, for instance, with limited access to the knowledge sought, the questioner presents himself or herself as less knowledgeable (K-) than the recipient; the recipient, who is expected to have access incongruence is taken as a norm in some institutional settings, most notably in classrooms where a teacher asks students a question despite having the answer already (e.g., Rusk, Sahlström, & Pörn, 2017). Considered ungenuine, teachers’ questions are characterized as display or test questions used to elicit students’ knowledge (e.g., Koshik, 2009; Lee, 2006, 2008). Display questions subject a students’ response to an evaluation, which frequently engenders the typical IRE/F (initiation-response-evaluation/feedback) format (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). In a way, teachers’ questions position the students as K-, demanding that they give an answer in order for them to be ratified as knowing. By answering the question, students generally submit themselves to the epistemic dynamic established by a teacher’s question. It only remains to be investigated whether teachers have a certain level of anticipation as to the students’ access to the required answer and, if they do, how it may be expressed in and through the developing talk. My observation of data suggests that teachers indeed have assumptions regarding students’ epistemic access and show them through the unfolding of question-answer sequences, as will be analyzed in the subsequent sections.

Previous research has shown that teachers are keenly oriented to students’ epistemic states, as reflected in various practices of questioning. Some research has explored the connection between the grammatical format of a question and teachers’ estimation of students’ access to the answer. Margutti (2006), for instance, has shown that certain question types such as yes-no questions and Eliciting Completion Device (also known as Designedly Incomplete Utterance: DIU, Koshik, 2002) convey the teacher’s stance that the class is accessible to the answer. In another study (Margutti, 2010), she zeroed in on a clausal DIU used to highlight a key point, and demonstrated that the particular question form casts learners as knowing. A line of research has also shown that teachers issue certain types of questions in particular positions, monitoring or eliciting displays of epistemic access. Heller (2017) has demonstrated that questions of a certain type (i.e., ‘does anyone know’) immediately after a teacher question express a stance that the class as whole are not expected to know the answer yet. Sert (2013) has observed that teachers’ epistemic status check is preceded by students’ verbal and non-verbal display of no knowledge. Lastly, Koole (2010) has shown that teachers elicit distinctive types of epistemic access (understanding vs. knowing) in different sequential positions and that different types of questions elicit different displays of knowing (e.g., “do you know” questions elicit a demonstration of having already known).

Extending this line of research, this paper explores teachers’ assumptions about students’ epistemic access manifested in the unfolding talk, focusing specifically on how these assumptions may be related to the use of the opening up method. To this end, I examine the development of question-answer sequences, scrutinizing the design and delivery of questions, responses, and the subsequent talk that follows students’ display of access to the required answer or lack thereof. Through this examination, it will be argued that the opening up method is associated with varying levels of answer anticipation from, roughly low- to high-level answer anticipation. As will be shown, teachers orient to the nature of the question recipient’s being composed of individuals with different repertoires of knowledge. Given this consideration, teachers’ answer anticipation is characterized in terms of a continuum of ‘only a few, possibly none of the cohort, can answer’ anticipation at one end and ‘all can answer’ anticipation at the other; it will be shown that the opening up method is tied to a wide range of answer anticipation covering both ends. Based on this observation, I contemplate the possibility that it is a default elicitation method.
III. Data and Method

The data excerpts presented here draw on 12 video-recorded 5th and 6th grade EFL lessons in Korean primary schools. The data were collected for two larger research projects. The lessons were taught by 11 different Korean English teachers, except for one class where a Korean teacher and a native-speaking English teacher taught collaboratively. Each class consisted of about 20 and more students, and they were seated facing the teacher(s) or in groups. English was the main instructional medium though teachers occasionally used Korean. The lessons aimed at teaching communicative functions based on the textbooks developed according to the national curriculum.

This paper adopted CA as an analytical framework, which aims to make sense of the participant’s interactional conduct from their own perspective, rather than an external researcher’s point of view (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). The analysis was focused on the collections of talk that surround the sequences initiated by teachers’ display questions addressed to the cohort. Toward the goal of uncovering the connection between an elicitation method and the underlying assumptions, I examine the moment-by-moment unfolding of question-answer sequences. Data excerpts are transcribed following CA conventions (Jefferson, 2004)1).

Before proceeding to the analysis of data, some remarks regarding the questions asked via the opening up method are in order. First, they appeared in various grammatical forms such as wh-questions, yes-no questions, and DIUs. Teachers occasionally relied on non-verbal actions such as pausing for a moment or pointing, which were treated as an attempt to elicit knowledge within the context. Questions were also framed as a ‘polite’ request (i.e., can you tell me X), but teachers typically directly demanded an answer using an interrogative form. In addition, the questions were generally used to elicit the display of more or less ‘simple’ linguistic or general background knowledge (knowledge of English words, names of things, etc.). It appears that there is no particular connection between grammatical forms or functional uses of questions and levels of teachers’ answer anticipation. Instead of examining questions out of the context, I analyze the development of question-answer sequences, in and through which teachers show varying assumptions regarding the answerability of questions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. I first examine the assumptions manifested in successful elicitations in which a question is responded to with a required answer. Then I examine the assumptions manifested in failed elicitations, in which teacher initially fail to elicit a required answer. Teachers’ responses to correct or incorrect answers, alongside various other aspects of the unfolding talk, reveal that their anticipation indeed varies, ranging from ‘very few can answer’ anticipation to ‘all can answer without any exception’ anticipation. This observation will be followed by a brief discussion of the limiting method to compare it to the opening up method.

IV. Findings

1. Assumptions Manifested in Successful Elicitations2)

Successful elicitations frequently entail a choral answer; that is, teachers pose a question, opening up the opportunity to all the members of the cohort, who do take that opportunity by responding with a required answer. This results in a choral response, as shown in excerpts (3)-(4). Each excerpt is followed by a brief analysis.

Excerpt (3)

|   | T: |
|---|---|
| 1 | Box. |
| 2 | It’s a::? |
| 3 | Box. ((slightly louder and more unanimously)) |
| 4 | Ok|ay. |

Lifting the box with both of her hands, the teacher asks...

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1) transcription conventions are as follows:
- [ ] the beginning of overlapped talk
- (0.0) length of silence
- () micro-pause
- underlining relatively high pitch or volume
- :: noticeably lengthened sound
- , sudden cut-off of the current sound
- = ‘latched’ utterances
- ? rising intonation
- . falling intonation
- <= continuing intonation
- ((words)) comments by the transcriber (including the description of non-verbal behavior)
- > < increase in tempo
- S/Ss Student/Students
- T Teacher

2) Unlike failed elicitations, successful elicitations offer limited interactional information publicly available to use for an external researcher to observe teachers’ answer anticipation. The discussion in this section mainly draws on the observation of how tolerant teachers are with students who remain silent without answering questions.
what it is (line 1). It is immediately followed by an in-unison answer (line 2). The teacher repeats the question in the form of a DIU, which is met by a louder and more unanimous answer (lines 3 and 4). The teacher accepts the answer with ‘okay’ (line 5).

Excerpt (4)

1  T: It’s Wednesday. That’s right. What is the date today?
2  Ss: It’s May twenty first. (some say ‘twenty second’)
3  T: =Twenty first. (out of unison)
4  T: Twenty one or twenty first?
5  Ss: Twenty first.
6  T: All right. >Good job<. Cz, everybody. >look up here<. Cz. let’s to-

Excerpt (4) is drawn from a typical beginning of a lesson, in which teachers ask a series of questions in elicitation of ‘basic’ knowledge for saying the date in English. At lines 1-3, the teacher asks the date and the students give a choral response. At line 4, the teacher issues an alternative question, double-checking the knowledge of how to say the date, which supports that the immediately preceding question is a display question, not a genuine inquiry. At line 6, the teacher accepts with ‘All: right.’, and moves to close the activity thus far with a positive evaluation (>Good job<) (Waring, 2008).

As shown in excerpts (3)-(4), the opening up method elicits an in-unison answer by multiple students or a choral response. This is not always the case, however. Questions are not necessarily followed by a choral response. Some or many of the students may choose to remain silent without taking the opportunity to answer, as exemplified in excerpt (5).

Excerpt (5)

1  T: Okay. When do we use this map?
2  S4: To catch the criminal.
3  T: Yeah, catch the criminal.

The teacher asks the class about the use of some map they appear to have used for a previous activity (line 1), and a student volunteers an answer while the others remain silent (line 2). Regardless of the silence, the teacher confirms the answer via repetition (line 3), as in excerpts (3)-(4) where a choral or in-unison answer is dealt with. Consider excerpt (6) for another instance. Here the teacher is reading a story to the class. Doing so, the teacher asks questions, eliciting the names of sea animals shown in the pictures. The questions are notably responded to by different numbers of students.

Excerpt (6)

1  T: Okay. So there is lots of fish here, crab, octopus, turtle, snail,=
2     ~What’s this?
3  S: Starfish.
4  T: Starfish. This one?
5  S: Whale.
6  T: Whale, okay. [Here we go=]
7     [(flips the page)]
8  T: ~>Where is my mommy?~ =
9  T: ~>Where’s it?~
10 T: ~>That’s it~
11 S: Crab.
12 S: ~>Crab~
13 T: [Crab. Very good. “I can help you. Go straight one block”. (continues to read)

Pointing to the sea animals in a picture (line 1), the teacher lists the words denoting some of them (crab, octopus, turtle, snail) before she asks questions eliciting ‘starfish’ and then ‘whale’ at lines 2 and 4, respectively. Both questions are followed by a choral response (lines 3 and 5). At line 10, the teacher similarly attempts to elicit the word for another sea animal, ‘crab.’ This time, however, the question is only followed by one student’s answer at line 11, subsequently followed by the repetition of the answer by one of the students at line 12. One may argue that the silence of the majority of the students indicates the lack of willingness rather than the lack of knowledge, but it is not likely that they suddenly lose willingness to answer given that they provided a choral response only a couple of turns earlier at lines 3 and 5. The sudden decline in the number of answerers is not problematized by the teacher; she only confirms the answer at line 13 as she has dealt with the preceding choral responses.

Taken together, successful elicitations exemplified in excerpts (3)-(6) show that the opening up method welcomes any number of simultaneous answers. Although choral responses are prevalent, questions are generally answered by various numbers of students, from one to, roughly many, if not all. Regardless of the actual number of students who answer, teachers similarly respond by positively evaluating the performance (via the confirmation of the answers). Regardless of how many there are that do not answer, they are not penalized as if the entire group of students’ answering is not necessarily expected. In sum, instances of successful elicitation show that the opening up method is used, conveying varying levels of teachers’ estimation concerning students’ epistemic access. Teachers’ answer anticipation is further specified through the observation of failed elicitations.

2. Assumptions Manifested in Failed Elicitations

Exploring teachers’ assumptions underlying knowledge elicitation in failed instances, this section focuses on
examining how teachers respond to silence or an incorrect answer. They often display a stance toward students’ display of not knowing, which reveals how they have estimated students’ access to the required answer. The examination of failed elicitation (thus of failed performance) reveals a wide spectrum in teachers’ expectation as to students’ epistemic access. As was briefly mentioned in section ?, teachers’ answer anticipation is characterized in term of a continuum, which represents ‘very few, if none, can answer’ anticipation at the low-level anticipation end and ‘all can answer’ anticipation at the opposite, high-level anticipation end. I discuss the results in two broad categories, i.e., high- and low- levels of answer anticipation in relative terms.

A. Displaying High-level Answer Anticipation

Teachers display relatively high-level answer anticipation, for instance, by treating the display of not knowing as unexpected, as shown in excerpt (7). Immediately prior to this excerpt, the class has gone over the expression, ‘what do you do in your free time.’ At line 1, the teacher shows an incomplete sentence with the blanks to be filled with ‘in your free time,’ trying to elicit it from the cohort. As the class has repeatedly practiced the target question prior to the excerpt (not shown here), the teacher arguably has a basis on which she can assume the students’ access to the answer.

The question, however, is met by a student’s outright claim of inability to ‘find what is missing’ (line 2), which is then followed by the teacher’s exaggerated display of surprise (line 3); the teacher does not take the response seriously. The crowd (observers of the class as well as the students) also treats the series of talk as laughable (line 4). The teacher brings herself back into a serious mode, repeating the question in her normal voice (line 5); this time, she simply demands an answer using an interrogative. However, the entire cohort remains silent (line 6). In response, the teacher invokes the limiting method by raising her hand before she stops it and has the class discuss the answer in groups (lines 7-8). What is particularly notable here is the soft response cry that the teacher produces as she shifts to the limiting method (‘Owh::’); along with the teacher’s facial expression indicating unpleasant surprise, ‘owh::’ embodies the teacher’s reaction to the complete silence, which is most likely to indicate the entire cohort’s having no access to the answer. The teacher treats no one’s having access as surprising and thus unanticipated, which, in turn, suggests that she has anticipated that at least some student(s), arguably if not many or all, would be able to answer the question.

Teachers show high-level answer anticipation by treating such a display of not knowing not only surprising but also not acceptable. In excerpt (8), the teacher tacitly ‘claims’ that the question is, in fact, highly answerable to the extent that anyone should have access to the answer by taking up a stance toward an incorrect answer. For a textbook exercise that requires students to correct misspelled words, the teacher is explaining how to do the exercise using one of the given words, camping.

Excerpt (8)

| Line | T     | Ss    |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1    | T:    | ‘Camping. Right, Uh, look at this. ((points at the target word)) |
| 2    | Is this how you spell camping? |
| 3    | S:    | Yes. |
| 4    | T:    | ‘Really?< |
| 5    | Ss:   | ‘No, no, no, no. |
| 6    | T:    | ‘C-A-O-M-P-B-D-I-N-G-A-K? Is this how you spell camping? |
| 7    | Ss:   | ‘No.: |

The teacher directs the class’s attention to an exercise item, the misspelled word ‘caompbdingak’(line 1). She asks a polarity question (line 2), which is tricky in the sense that the teacher anticipates a structurally dispreferred response, ‘no’ (Schegloff, 2007). One student quickly volunteers a response only to be tricked by the question; he answers ‘yes’ (line 3). In response, the teacher speedily says ‘>Really?<’ with a questioning voice as if she conveys her disbelief that anyone would answer incorrectly (line 4). In overlap with the teacher’s ‘>Really?<’, the students immediately contradict the initial response by answering ‘no’ (line 5). Despite multiple students’ offering the correct answer, the teacher persists in problematizing one single incorrect ‘yes’ response; she reads out loud the ostensibly incorrect spelling of the word in a question intonation as if she expresses disbelief (line 6). In the same line, she then repeats the question, clearly conveying a negative evaluative stance (Waring, 2012). This is followed by a unanimous ‘no’ answer (line 7). The
teacher’s insistence on a single case of fallacy, which
could even be a momentary lapse of performance, sug-
gests that the teacher views the question as highly answer-
able to the extent that even a mistake, even by a single
student, is not allowed; that is, the question is so highly
answerable that anyone should be able to answer it with-
out any exception.

Excerpts (7) and (8) show that teachers treat a display of
not knowing as unexpected or not even allowed, exhib-
iting that they had relatively high-level answer anticipa-
tion.

B. Displaying Low-level Answer Anticipation

On the contrary, teachers may take an ‘understanding’
position toward failed performance, thereby showing that
they, in fact, had low-level answer anticipation. In excerpt
(9), the teacher takes a more or less ‘generous’ stance to an
incorrect answer; she accepts any ‘value’ it may have
despite the incorrectness. The class is reviewing the day’s
lesson, which focused on how to self-identify on the
phone.

Excerpt (9)

1  T: First, we have to introduce ourselves.
2       So [how do we say. (0.2) In in English?]=
3       (points at ‘this is class six one’ written in Korean.)
4       =0(1)
5  S?: Un.
6  SS: We are class six one.
7  T: We are class six one, but in phone conversation we say?=
8  S: =(say ‘this is’ silently)=
9  SS: =This is [class six one.]
10  T: [class six one. Very good.

Pointing at the Korean translation of ‘this is class six
one,’ the teacher asks the class how to introduce them-
selves on the phone (lines 1-3). Though the Korean ver-
sion contains wuli, the first person plural pronoun, it is
conventional that the demonstrative ‘this’ is used instead
of the personal pronoun in self-identification in English
phone conversation. After a slight hesitation (line 4), the
students produce a response (some of the students stum-
bles on the part ‘class’, which is outnumbered by those
who correctly include the word) at line 6. In response, the
teacher repeats it as if she confirms the correctness of it at
line 7; it is indeed a well-formed, literal translation of the
Korean sentence. In the same line, however, the teacher
furthers her turn with a follow-up question (‘but in phone
conversation we say?’), which renders the answer unac-
tceptable in the specific context in point (i.e., over the
phone).

It is noted here that the teacher does not completely
reject the response; that is, she starts her evaluation turn by
accepting the formal aspect of it though she ultimately
ejects the appropriateness of the form in the specific con-
text. In addition, the teacher does not hesitate to confirm
the response as if she foresaw it. It is also worthy of noting
that the teacher does not allow sufficient time for the stu-
dents to amend their response on their own. Latching onto
the follow-up question (‘but in phone conversation we
say?’), the teacher offers the most obvious hint by mouth-
ing the key expression, ‘this is’ silently (line 8). The pro-
vision of the crucial support reflects the teacher’s
understanding that the students need it in order to give the
required answer. At line 9, the students respond with the
required answer, which is followed by an explicit positive
evaluation (line 10). As analyzed, various aspects of the
teacher’s dealing with an incorrect answer indicates her
tolerance toward incomplete knowledge; this suggests
that the teacher had low-level answer anticipation.

Alternatively, teachers may cease to elicit an answer
altogether, showing that they have decided that the ques-
tion is highly unanswerable, as in excerpt (10) below. The
class has just reviewed a previous lesson by asking and
answering when certain special days (i.e., the Earth day
and the Cookie day) are. In the excerpt, they continue the
lesson, focusing on how to describe the activities that take
place on these special days; the teacher is trying to intro-
duce the expressions needed for the description through
question-answer sequences. She successfully elicited
the expression for the Earth Day (not shown) and is now
moving on to elicit the expressions for the Cookie Day at
line 1.

Excerpt (10)

1  T: That’s right. Good job. Gs, next. (2.0) ‘th ahhh ch do you know this day?
2       What special day is this?
3  Ss: Cookie day(out of unision)
4  T: It’s, Cookie Day. What are they doing now?
5       (0.1)
6  T: [Can you guess]
7  Ss: [They: (out of unision, unimelligible talk)]
8  T: They are,
9  Ss: ([unimelligible mumbleing])
10  S?: Eating the cookies.
11  T: Enjoy the cookie? Eating cookies? [No,=]
12  SS: [No].
13  T: =They are l think they are selling, (0.1) selling cookies
14  and she is, [buying,=]
15  Ss: [buying.
16  T: Buying cookies. All right. Okay. Today we are going to learn these special days.

It should be noted that the teacher’ answer anticipation
is already projected at the outset of the series of ques-
tioning. After announcing the departure to the ‘next’ spe-
cial day (‘next,’) at line 1, the teacher produces a deep in-
breath, immediately followed by an out-breath, as if she
prepares herself ready for the ‘challenge’ on the horizon.
Then the teacher embarks on the questioning by asking
the first question (lines 1-2). Given her formulation of a
question, directly demanding the name of the day, the first
question is not what she has estimated as not so answer-
able. Indeed, the students immediately respond with an
expected answer (line 3). After the confirmation (line 4),
she continues straight with the question eliciting ‘what
they are doing.’ The subsequent addition that the teacher
makes reveals that it is the question that she has estimated
as posing a challenge; that is, after a micro-pause (line 5),
the teacher requests that the cohort ‘guess,’ rather than
telling her, the answer. The question is treated as involv-
ing ‘guessing’ to answer.

At line 8, the teacher starts to answer the question her-
self, but stops at a point where the crucial information is
about to be revealed, giving a chance for them to com-
plete the answer. Into the unintelligible talk (line 9), S3
offers a candidate answer with a loud voice (line 10). The
teacher repeats the answer in a question intonation and
then rephrases it in the same question intonation as if she
seeks a clarification (line 11). Without waiting for a clar-
ification or for the others to respond, the teacher imme-
diately rejects the response with ‘no’ (line 11). Then she
completely ceases to elicit the answer by choosing to give
the students the answer though she invites the cohort’s
participation along the way to completing the answer
(lines 13-14 and 16).

As shown in this excerpt, teachers may stop elicitation,
hurrying down the sequence. They decide to ‘teach’ rather
than ‘test’ the students, which may indicate their estimat-
on of students’ access to the answer: that is, very few, if
none, can answer the question.

In sum, the analysis of failed elicitations suggests that
teachers have a wide range of levels of answer anticipa-
tion. They may expect questions to be answered by at least
some of the students or by all without any exception as in
excerpts (7) and (8), respectively; teachers also show rel-
ative tolerance toward an incorrect answer, displaying
their expectation that the question can be correctly
answered by very few or even none, as shown in excerpts
(9) and (10).

These observations support the findings gleaned from
successful elicitations; the opening up method is used,
conveying a wide range of levels of answer anticipation,
expressed on a continuum of low-level anticipation at one
end (‘only a few, if not none, can answer’ anticipation)
and ‘high-level’ anticipation at the other (‘all can answer
with no exception’ anticipation).

Given the wide scope of use associated with the open-
ing up method, I contemplate the possibility that it is a
default form of answer elicitation that teachers widely
adopt for any level of answer anticipation. I support the
generic nature of the method by contrasting it to the lim-
iting method in the next section, which briefly discusses
the peculiar distribution of the limiting method on the con-
tinuum of answer anticipation.

3. The Opening up Method vs. The Limiting Method

The limiting method appears in a narrower range of
context than the opening up method, specifically where
questions are treated as more or less unanswerable. First,
consider excerpt (11) where the class are reviewing
expressions that they have learned that day. The teacher
has asked the class to remember four specific sentences,
which she showed on the screen only for a moment.

After checking the students’ readiness (line 1), the
teacher makes one of the pictures (the other side of which
a sentence is ‘hidden’) disappear, gazing at the class for a
0.8-second long as if she invites the students’ response
(lines 3-4). In the face of the ensuing silence, which most
likely signals the challenge that the given task has posed to
the cohort (line 4), the teacher finally articulates the elici-
tation, notably asking if they know the answer (line 5). In
doing so, the teacher shows that she is orienting to the pos-
sibility that they do not know it. In such context where the

Excerpt (11)

1 T: Are you ready?
2 Ss: Yes.
3 T: \{(removes a picture leaving the space blank)\}
4 \{(0.8) (T gazes at the class)\}
5 T: Do you know the answer? -- Anyone, do you know the answer?
6 \{(raises a hand)\}
7 S: \{(a hand up shown on the video)\}
8 \{(1.5) (students raise hand)\}
9 T: Nass.
10 S: \{\}
11 T: What’s the answer?
12 N: \{(Birthday party).\}
13 T: Would you say the full sentence?
14 N: Would you like to come to (my) birthday party?
15 T: Everything everyone is he right?
16 Ss: \{Yes.\}
17 T: \{Good job::: Repeat after me.\}

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teacher makes one of the pictures (the other side of which
a sentence is ‘hidden’) disappear, gazing at the class for a
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(lines 3-4). In the face of the ensuing silence, which most
likely signals the challenge that the given task has posed to
the cohort (line 4), the teacher finally articulates the elici-
tation, notably asking if they know the answer (line 5). In
doing so, the teacher shows that she is orienting to the pos-
sibility that they do not know it. In such context where the
teacher displays relatively low-level answer anticipation, she raises her hand, inviting students’ bids for a turn to answer alone (line 6). A student raises his hand, bidding for a turn at the same time (line 7), which shows that he also treats the occasion as calling for the relevance of individual performance (as will be shown below, students orient to the particular context where the limiting method can be used). Nominated, Nass secures a chance to answer (line 10). Failing to give the entire sentence in complete form (line 13), however, he is given a second chance to offer the answer again (lines 14-15). His answer undergoes the entire class’s ratification (lines 16-17), which is followed by the teacher’s praise (line 18).

In this example, in the face of the opening up method’s having failed to elicit any response (line 4), the teacher chooses the limiting method for her subsequent attempt at elicitation, rather than insisting on the initial method. She departs from the default mode of elicitation so as to deal with the contingency where the question is shown to pose a challenge to the students.

The confined use of the limiting method is also observed in the following instance, where the teacher revokes the limiting method in the works; the teacher switches back to the opening up method in the face of sequential ‘evidence’ indicating that a question is more or less answerable by many students. In excerpt (12), the class is engaged in a teacher-led activity, where the teacher says a descriptive sentence that contains faulty information about the person shown in a picture and then the students correct it. At line 1, Don gives a correction of the teacher’s statement.

At line 2, the teacher registers Don’s correction with ‘yeah.’ Then she instantly poses a question, eliciting a correction of Don’s word choice ‘yellow.’ As shown at line 4, students raise their hands, claiming an opportunity to answer alone to the question. The teacher allows as long as a 0.8 second silence as if she waits for more students to bid for a turn. When many of the students indeed have their hands up, tacitly claiming that they have the knowledge, the teacher directs the class to answer ‘all together’, officially revoking the limiting method. She rejects the proposed use of the limiting method in the face of ‘evidence’ that the question is likely to be answered by many of the students. In turn, this suggests that the teacher orients to the peculiar use of the limiting method skewed toward low-level answer anticipation.

Also noteworthy about the limiting method is that it can be invoked by students, as already shown in excerpts (11) and (12). Just like teachers, students also orient to certain questions as deserving the limiting method, particularly for the level of challenge that they pose. Excerpt (13) shows that students invoke the limiting method in such a context where the question is evidently not readily answerable. Here the teacher is eliciting the students’ guesses about the object in a box, and, in doing so, she opens up the opportunity to answer to all the students (line 2). In that they have to ‘guess’ something without any clue (except that it is something that can be put in the box), the elicitation already poses a great challenge.

Excerpt (13)

1 T: Can you guess (what:::)’s (0.2) here?
   2 [(points inside with both hands)]
   3 ()
   4 T: Can you guess what are the box?
   5 S: [((unintelligible))]
   6 (0.2)
   7 T: On::: Chung::
   8 Chung: =[:II answer, candy:::
   9 T: Candy? No candi::: Won::
   10 [((laughter from the watching crowd))]
   11 Won: I will answer, I think it’s a book.

The students indeed show that they are treating the question as not answerable; as shown by the lack of forth-comingness (lines 3 and 6), no one immediately takes the risk of an incorrect guess. A student expresses that the question is legitimate for the limiting method; a student raises her hand, indicating that she has an idea. Though this is not shown on the video, it is evidenced by the teacher’s talk at line 7; she produces a response cry ‘oh:::’ expressing ‘delight’ for finally identifying a student with her hand up. The student is nominated, but fails to offer a correct answer.

How the teacher responds to the incorrect answer is also noteworthy; she first repeats the answer in a question intonation and then plainly rejects it in a playful voice (line 9),...
which invites laughter from the crowd (line 10). The incorrect guess is treated as a playful event. In other words, the lack of access is not treated as unexpected or particularly concerning, suggesting that the teacher has already anticipated the trouble on the part of the students in figuring out what is hidden in the box. In the subsequent talk not shown here, it turns out that the purpose of the question is not even to test students’ knowledge but to arouse curiosity about the hidden object (i.e., a book), indicative of the upcoming activity (i.e., reading a story).

In this example, both the teacher and students treat the question not readily answerable. While the teacher uses the generic elicitation mode, the students seek an opportunity to answer alone by invoking the limiting method themselves.

In sum, the import of the limiting method is oriented to and utilized not only by the teacher and but also by the students. My observation of data indicates that students frequently take initiative in using the limiting method, seeking an opportunity to perform alone. However, they do not invoke this method for any question. They orient to the narrower scope of use that the method is associated with by selectively invoking it where there is legitimate ground for it, as clearly shown in excerpt (13). In contrast to the limiting method skewed toward the low-level answer anticipation end of the continuum, the opening up method has a wide spectrum of use in conveying teachers’ assumptions about students’ epistemic access. As such, it may be a generic method of answer elicitation not bounded by a particular level of answer anticipation.

V. Conclusion

This paper explored the assumptions that teachers have as to students’ access to an answer being elicited, focusing on how they may be associated with the opening up method. The analysis showed that it is used, reflecting a wide range of teachers’ anticipation of correct answers. It was shown that teachers’ anticipation greatly varies on a continuum, ranging from low-level, ‘very few, if none, can answer’ anticipation at one end to high-level, ‘all can answer without any exception’ anticipation at the other. Given the wide spectrum of teacher anticipation reflected in the opening up method, it is distinguished from the limiting method with a much narrower scope of use.

It should be noted that teachers do not treat a cohort as a single entity when they invite any of the students to answer. Although not always very clearly, they show their orientation to the characteristics of a class that consists of multiple students with varying repertoires of knowledge and different degrees of willingness; they estimate the level of challenge that each question poses to such a group in terms of approximately how many of them should be able to answer. As shown by the observation of successful and failed elicitation instances, teachers exhibit varying levels of tolerance toward students’ display of having no access to the required answer. Sometimes, they do not problematize the majority of the students who provide no answer at all as if that was already anticipated. At other times, they linger on an incident where only a single student provides an incorrect answer, thereby expressing how unacceptable that is.

In conclusion, teachers ask questions of varying difficulty levels using the opening up method, and, in doing so, they make publicly visible what expectations they have of the cohort’s performance through their discursive conduct. It should be noted that this observation was derived from the analysis of a data set gathered from one similar instructional setting, i.e., Korean primary school EFL classrooms. To make up for this limitation, further research needs to examine the use of the opening method in various other instructional settings. Despite the weakness of this research, it is hoped that the findings will contribute to the existing literature on knowledge elicitation in the classroom.

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