



## The Role of Teacher Talk and Interactional Scaffolding in Modern Communicative Classrooms for ESL: A Review Study

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### Abstract

This narrative literature review synthesizes empirical and conceptual research (2014-2025) on teacher talk and interactional scaffolding in ESL/EFL classrooms to explain how interactional practices create learning opportunities aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Drawing on sociocultural theory, interactional/CA-informed classroom research, and SLA perspectives, the review maps recurring interactional mechanisms through which teachers shape participation: contingent questioning, expansion moves, input modification, feedback sequences, and wait-time management. Across studies, teacher talk appears not as neutral input but as a mediational resource that organizes turn-taking, sustains learner contributions, and supports negotiation of meaning. The synthesis further shows that scaffolding is most effective when it is contingent, co-constructed, and responsive to learners' moment-by-moment needs, although evidence remains limited about long-term development and online/multimodal contexts. The review concludes with implications for CLT-oriented pedagogy, emphasizing interactional sensitivity, reduced evaluative closure, and scaffolded participation as pathways to strengthen learners' interactional competence and communicative development.

**Keywords:** Classroom discourse; communicative language teaching; interactional competence; interactional scaffolding; sociocultural theory; teacher talk

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## 1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a method that fosters effective communication and at the same time gives autonomy to students. However, these aims are closely linked to the organization of classroom interaction in real time. The trend in recent studies is to see teacher talk and classroom communication not as a neutral passing along of input, but rather as an interactive resource that finds engagement, chances for learner's spoken output, and the situations in which learning can happen (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Li & Walsh, 2023). In addition, teacher talk plays a pivotal role in shaping

classroom discourse and helping communicative competence in ESL contexts (Devi, 2024; Sharma, 2024). The teachers' control over who speaks when, who has the right to speak, and how they respond to students' contributions can either enhance or limit the learners' capacity and agency, especially in L2 teaching where the learners' participation is directly linked to their growth in language skill (Li & Walsh, 2023). The present article is a survey of the literature that covers the teacher's language, the interactional scaffolding, and the development of the interactional competence in L2 classrooms and such a characterization of the research is meant to be primarily based on conversation analytic and interaction focused studies. The review is written in a narrative style and it maps out the principal themes, agreements, and debates that are still going on, and it identifies the areas of literature that are lacking, all while concentrating on the ways teachers create interactional openings through contingent questioning, expansion moves, input modification, and scaffolded support (Chen & Yang, 2022; Sert, 2015; Waring, 2016).

Across studies, there is agreement that contingent teaching can support learners' moment by moment development by prompting clarification, elaboration, and refinement of output (Sert, 2015), and that expansion moves can model more complex language while sustaining engagement (Waring, 2016). In a similar way, research conducted in Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) proves that when evaluative closure is reduced and wait time is increased, learner participation can be enhanced (Li & Walsh, 2023). Teacher talk functions as a primary mediational tool in second language acquisition, enabling learners to negotiate meaning and develop communicative competence (Sharma, 2022). At the same time, the academic community points to an unresolved debate concerning the best amount of mediation and whether scaffolding should be regarded mainly as teacher mediated guidance or as mutually created dialogue. By interweaving these together, this review explains the current state of knowledge about interactional practices in ESL/ EFL based instruction and signals new areas for research and teacher growth.

Despite extensive work on classroom interaction, the literature remains fragmented across teacher talk, Classroom Interactional Competence, and scaffolding traditions, with limited integrative synthesis showing how specific interactional moves function together to produce CLT-aligned opportunities for learner participation. In addition, existing studies often emphasize short episodes of interaction, leaving underexplored (a) how scaffolding contributes to longer-term interactional competence, and (b) how teacher talk practices shift across modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, online) and proficiency levels. Addressing these gaps, this review synthesizes 2014-2025 research to clarify converging mechanisms and unresolved tensions, and to derive theoretically grounded implications for CLT and sociocultural perspectives on mediated learning.

## **2. Methodology**

A narrative review design with systematic search and screening procedures was employed to synthesize conceptually diverse research on teacher talk and interactional scaffolding. This approach is suitable for mapping themes, points of convergence, and ongoing debates across

interaction-focused traditions while keeping transparent search and inclusion decisions. Narrative literature reviews are effective for synthesizing conceptually diverse research (Sert, 2015). This was particularly useful considering the vast amount of research available about teacher talk, interactional scaffolds and Classroom Discourse. The process of conducting a narrative literature review included a systematic search of the literature, screening of the articles found, thematic coding and integration of the findings into a single cohesive document.

A systematic search was conducted between March and November 2025 across Google Scholar, ERIC, SAGE, Wiley, and Scopus using combined terms related to teacher talk, interactional scaffolding, classroom discourse, and interactional competence. Eligible studies were peer-reviewed, published between 2014-2025, situated in ESL/EFL based classrooms, grounded in sociocultural theory, CDA, or interactional linguistics and provided empirical analyses of teacher–student interaction. Titles/abstracts were screened first, followed by full-text screening of eligible articles. Included studies were coded for teacher-talk functions, scaffolding moves, participation structures, and instructional contexts; themes were generated through iterative comparison across codes to produce higher-order categories for synthesis. Excluded were pre-2014 publications, non-peer-reviewed work, dissertations, and studies lacking interactional focus. Studies were coded for teacher-talk functions, scaffolding strategies, interactional patterns, and instructional contexts, forming the thematic basis for the review’s synthesis.

### **3. Findings**

#### **3.1 Teacher Talk as a Key Driver of Interactional Opportunities**

Across the reviewed studies, there is strong agreement that teacher talk is a primary mechanism through which interactional opportunities are created, distributed, and sustained in L2 classrooms. Talk by the teacher is not considered to be a single uniform input; rather, it is depicted consistently as an array of interactional moves, the effects of which depend on the context and sequence of their method (Adnan & Saad, 2020). The analysis of conversation supports this notion, proving that the interaction in the classroom is dictated by teachers' actions at each moment, and different teacher movements lead to different conditions for students' participation and language development (Braun & Clarke, 2019). One of the predominant themes is the importance of teacher responses that are contingent, such as asking for clarification, giving prompts, and following up with questions, which are considered as interactional resources that make it possible for learners to continuously improve their language output in real time (Sert, 2015). In the same way, expansion moves are repeatedly pointed out as how teachers can introduce more complex grammatical structures while keeping them accessible interactionally, thus encouraging learners' involvement in the dialogue beyond just providing minimal responses (Waring, 2016). Practices such as improving turn-taking, reducing evaluative closure, and increasing wait time are linked to greater opportunities for learners to speak up and contribute more substantively (Li & Walsh, 2023).

At the same time, the literature suggests an unresolved tension about how much teacher

guidance is best. On the one hand, it is true that teacher backs-up and elaboration can increase more students to the discussion, but on the other hand, too much teacher control or too many interventions might cause a drawback in the students' willingness to take part. This suggests conducting a thorough investigation into teachers' choices of talk and their adjustments according to the ability levels of students, task types and classroom modalities, particularly in the context of the ever-increasing interaction in hybrid and online settings. Across contexts, studies converge on the value of contingent teacher moves for sustaining learner turns; however, they diverge on the degree of teacher orchestration that remains compatible with learner autonomy, suggesting that optimal teacher talk is task- and- proficiency-sensitive rather than universally “more” or “less.”

### **3.2 Interactional Scaffolding as a Mechanism for Supporting Learning in Real Time**

The reviewed literature shows substantial agreement that scaffolding is most effective when it is socially enacted, interaction driven, and responsive to learners' immediate needs rather than delivered according to predetermined instructional routines. Across studies, scaffolding is conceptualized as co-constructed support that appears through collaborative interaction, where teachers and learners jointly build understanding within the given space conducive to learning (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Li & Walsh, 2023). This aligns with findings that mediating aid during input processing can help learners' movement from first comprehension toward deeper understanding of linguistic forms (Chen & Yang, 2022).

A notable trend is that scaffolding is rarely described as a single technique. Instead, it is enacted through sequences of prompts, checks, and opportunities for elaboration that help learners' meaning making during communication (Mercer et al., 2019). Loewen and Sato 2018 underscore that scaffolding is never a one-way street but rather a collaborative process that occurs through the use of question prompts used as tools for the learners to clarify and extend their understanding, hence the authors assert the relational aspect of scaffolding instead of the teacher led help model (Chen & Yang, 2022).

However, literature is still comparatively limited in two ways. First, many studies focus on short interactional episodes, leaving the durability of scaffolded gains over time underexplored. Second, scaffolding research is uneven across contexts. More work is needed to clarify how scaffolding sequences shift across proficiency levels and how they function under different constraints in online or multimodal classrooms. While most studies conceptualize scaffolding as contingent and interaction-driven, they differ in whether scaffolding is framed primarily as teacher-led mediation (e.g., recasts, modeling) or as co-constructed dialogue, indicating a theoretical tension about where agency exists within scaffolded sequences.

### **3.3 Interaction Patterns that Promote Communicative Participation**

The studies show the quality of interaction does not depend so much on single techniques but on how the teachers arrange their moves to keep the learners engaged, to support them and to create a space for prolonged learning outcome. In this view, interaction is treated as a dynamic system in which participation is shaped by the unfolding order of turns rather than by teacher actions in isolation.

One prominent trend involves correction-oriented patterns. Extended feedback sequences, in which teachers support learners through difficulty without supplying answers, are portrayed as interactional environments that encourage deeper processing and longer learner output (Bajaña et al., 2024). Complementing this, negotiation of meaning is repeatedly emphasized as beneficial for development because it creates conditions for learners to notice gaps, test hypotheses, and reformulate language in context (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Prompts that make learners reflect on form and meaning, can thus improve the effectiveness of corrective feedback and support self-correction even more, especially in case of learners who have high metacognitive awareness (Loewen & Sato, 2018). To sum up, the reviewed work shows a new direction. Understanding interactional development requires attention to the orchestration of teachers who move across sequences, not only the presence of individual strategies. Evidence consistently supports feedback sequences that keep interactional flow, but studies vary in whether explicit prompts or implicit repair yield longer learner uptake, pointing to the need for comparative work across proficiency levels and instructional goals.

## **4. Discussion**

This review synthesizes 2014-2025 research showing that teacher talk and interactional scaffolding align with CLT, functioning as strategic, interaction-shaping mechanisms that supports meaningful communication and L2 development across ESL/EFL classrooms.

### **4.1 Teacher Talk as a Resource for Mediating Learning**

Recent studies suggest that teacher talk is increasingly seen as a mechanism for controlling classroom behavior and more as a pedagogical resource for teaching L2 learning and participation. Devi (2024) advocates this change as she emphasizes that teacher talk functions as an interactional resource that structures participation and sustains communicative engagement in ESL classrooms. Moreover, teacher talk is linked to interactional primacy in so far as it supports learners in initiating, extending, and shaping their contributions (Li & Walsh, 2023). This aligns with micro-analytic accounts showing that learning opportunities appear through contingent teacher actions that are responsive to learner turns rather than delivered as predetermined input (Sert, 2015).

Among the studies examined, there is a wide agreement that contingent questioning, expansion moves, and input modification serve as complementary resources. The first one enables

real-time adaptation to the learner's needs (Sert, 2015), while the latter one allows teachers to present more complex models without pushing the learners to a corner (Waring, 2016). Teacher talk can prolong learner turns and enhance participation (Li & Walsh, 2023) but too much guidance or closure may curtail the opportunity for learner initiative. This points to a gap in the literature about how the teacher modulates the talk choices according to the students' proficiency levels, the type of tasks, and the result. In CLT-oriented classrooms, all these findings together highlight teacher talk as the primary resource for creating interactional conditions that foster the development of communicative learning.

#### **4.2 Interactional Scaffolding and Contingency as Central to Learning**

Literature is unanimous in asserting that scaffolding can be most beneficial with communication among the parties, being dependent on each other, and being jointly constructed, instead of being handed over as a rigid instructional sequence. Scaffolding has always been viewed as a social operation in which teachers and students together interpret, keep up with the progress of the task, and handle misunderstandings. According to Arora et al. (2024), scaffolding offers learning chances through prompts, recasts, and examples, with support immediacy as the characteristic that defines it. Bajaan et al. (2024) also display the case of scaffolded support being integrated into instruction that emphasizes input while still enabling learner's participation through repair and guided engagement.

At the same time, empirical positions vary in emphasis. Some accounts foreground teacher-led mediation through targeted moves such as recasts and examples (Arora et al., 2024), while others stress co-construction and learner collaboration as essential to scaffolding's effectiveness. This difference suggests that scaffolding may be best understood not as a single practice but as an interactional sequence that vary in how responsibility is distributed between teacher and learners (Chen & Yang, 2022). Nevertheless, a major limitation is that most of the proof is still tied to brief activities, therefore, the effect of scaffolding in long-term competence is difficult to answer yet.

The synthesis contributes theoretically by positioning teacher talk and scaffolding as a single mediated interactional system rather than separate pedagogical variables. From a sociocultural perspective, teacher talk works as a cultural tool that structures access to participation, while scaffolding is the contingent redistribution of aid within the learners' ZPD. Read through CLT, these interactional practices form the practical mechanism through which "communication" becomes learnable, by sustaining meaning negotiation, expanding learner turns, and reducing evaluative closure that truncates interaction.

#### **4.3 Interactional Patterns That Foster Communicative Competence**

Related work suggests that structured conversation exchange can generate more elaborate responses when it sustains learner engagement without reverting to restrictive Initiation, Response,

and Evaluation formats (Waring, 2016). An interactionist viewpoint suggests that learners modify their output not only helps them to think about their learning and negotiate the meaning but also strengthens their uptake and self-repair (Loewen & Sato, 2018). These researchers contribute to the understanding of positive communicative environment in the interactional settings which keep the communication open, give time for the formulation and put the learners in the active role of correcting and understanding meaning. A new research direction that is necessary for comparative studies that investigate how these interactional patterns function across tasks, and ability levels, thereby not about interactional quality as context dependent.

#### **4.4 Implications for Modern Communicative Pedagogy**

The reviewed trends collectively suggest that communicative pedagogy is strengthened when interaction is treated as the core medium of learning rather than as a channel for delivering content. What is more, it points out that the main missing items are not so much the debate of the advantages or disadvantages of certain teacher actions but rather the way in which teachers adjust and grade their actions across different environments and settings. Empirical evidence further demonstrates that supportive psychosocial classroom environments, shaped by teacher discourse and interactional sensitivity, significantly enhance learner engagement and communicative participation (Abbas & Iftikhar, 2025).

#### **4.5 Teacher Conceptual and theoretical implications**

- a. Teachers should use contingent questioning, longer wait-time, and reduced evaluative closure to expand learner turns and sustain meaning-focused interaction (Li & Walsh, 2023; Sert, 2015; Walsh, 2003).
- b. Scaffolding should be treated as contingent, co-constructed assistance, prompts, recasts, and modeling deployed in response to learner moves rather than pre-scripted routines (Arora et al., 2024; Chen & Yang, 2022).
- c. Teachers should calibrate the density of intervention to proficiency level and task demands to avoid over-orchestrating participation, especially in speaking-focused activities (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Waring, 2016).
- d. Communicative participation is strengthened when discourse practices operate within psychologically supportive environments that sustain risk-taking and engagement (Abbas & Iftikhar, 2025; Devi, 2024).

### **Conclusion**

This review synthesizes 2014-2025 research to show that teacher talk and interactional scaffolding are best understood as mediational, participation-shaping practices that operationalize CLT in real classroom interaction. The evidence indicates that learning opportunities appear through

contingent teacher moves, questioning, expansion, feedback, and wait-time management, that sustain learner turns and enable negotiation of meaning. Scaffolding is most effective when it is responsive and co-constructed, although existing research is still limited in tracking the durability of scaffolded gains over time and across modalities. The review contributes by integrating CLT and sociocultural theory to explain how interactional resources create conditions for interactional competence development. Future research should first examine longitudinal trajectories of scaffolded interactional competence, and then compare scaffolding sequences across proficiency levels and task types,

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### **Declaration**

The authors declare no part of this manuscript involves plagiarism or fabrication of data, and all ethical guidelines for educational research have been strictly adhered to during the conduct of the study. AI tools, if used, were solely for language refinement, grammatical clarity and formatting assistance. No AI tool was used for generating the core ideas, analysis, interpretations, or findings of the research.

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