

# A Functional Analysis of EFL Classroom Talk: The Case of Experience<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study investigated EFL classroom talk using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2013) meta-functions framework. Four female participants, including two experienced and two inexperienced teachers, taught similar grammar subjects to their intact classes. Classes were video-recorded and transcribed by the researchers. The meta-functions included topical themes, multiple themes, theme markedness and theme patterning. The results demonstrated differences between the experienced and inexperienced teachers' discourse on the use of simple themes, multiple themes, marked themes, and theme patterning. The total number of simple themes used by the inexperienced teachers was higher than their experienced colleagues, except for the interrogative clauses. However, the experienced teachers used more interpersonal and textual themes. In addition, patterns of theme development were found to be different in discourses of experienced and inexperienced teachers. This researchers concluded that the experienced teachers' talk was more cohesive, elaborated, and systematic. Moreover, it was shown that experience can play an important role in shaping language teachers' talk and theme/rheme distinction can be used as an effective tool to investigate the nature of it. Several implications concerning various stakeholders are provided at the end.

## Resumen

Este estudio investigó el habla en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera utilizando el marco de metafunciones de Halliday y Matthiessen (2013). Cuatro mujeres participantes, incluidas dos profesoras experimentadas y dos inexpertas, enseñaron materias de gramática similares a sus clases intactas. Las clases fueron grabadas en vídeo y transcritas por los investigadores. Las metafunciones incluían temas de actualidad, temas múltiples, marcado del tema y patrones del tema. Los resultados demostraron diferencias entre el discurso de los profesores experimentados e inexpertos sobre el uso de temas simples, temas múltiples, temas marcados y patrones temáticos. El número total de temas simples utilizados por los profesores inexpertos fue mayor que el de sus colegas experimentados, a excepción de las cláusulas interrogativas. Sin embargo, los profesores experimentados utilizaron temas más interpersonales y textuales. Además, se encontró que los patrones de desarrollo temático eran diferentes en los discursos de profesores experimentados e inexpertos. Estos investigadores concluyeron que el discurso de los profesores experimentados fue más cohesivo, elaborado y sistemático. Además, se demostró que la experiencia puede desempeñar un papel importante en la configuración del habla de los profesores de idiomas y que la distinción entre tema y rema puede utilizarse como una herramienta eficaz para investigar su naturaleza. Al final se proporcionan varias implicaciones relativas a las distintas partes interesadas.

## Introduction

Assuming teachers' talk as a primary medium of providing input to learners in the language classrooms (Moser et al., 2012), and the fact that "teachers control what goes on in classrooms primarily through the ways in which they use language" (Johnson, 1995, p. 9), a fundamental inquiry occupying educational researchers mind is how teachers' discourse facilitates knowledge construction. Rymes (2008) maintained that "teachers are best situated to study the localized and ever-changing discourse patterns specific to their own classrooms", by investigating classroom talk (p.8). Classroom talk is operationally defined as an institutional talk distinct from the ordinary conversation in which there is an unequal power exchange system. In this system, teachers are qualified to distribute topics and turns among students and assess learners' cooperation in interactions through repairs (Markee, 2000).

Recent research found that teachers' talk is associated with quality and length of students' replies (Molinari et al., 2013; Shintani, 2013; Shintani & Ellis, 2014). Previous studies offered extensively described events in the classroom and assumed that classroom talk affects learning. However, only few research studies attempted to examine it from a language learning behavior perspective (e.g., Shintani, 2013; Shintani & Ellis, 2014). As argued by Long (1996) and Lyster (1998), second language learning is directly under the influence of classroom

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talk. Examples of target language are provided through instructional exchanges between teacher and students as they use target language and obtain useful feedbacks. SLA researchers agree that classroom talk might facilitate second language learning by directing and heightening learners' attention to linguistic meanings and forms which is necessary for language learning (Markee & Kasper, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate classroom talk in some EFL classrooms using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2013) meta-functions framework.

### *Theoretical framework*

Following Halliday (1978), a systemic functional branch was introduced to the study of discourse and talk. He believed that language is a resource of sense making being negotiated in an authentic context. He maintained that pure linguistic analysis cannot deliver insightful visions on the nature of a particular discourse. However, what is needed is a functional analysis which can delineate why and how a particular linguistic choice is made in a particular instance of it. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) argued that it is impossible to dissociate language from its context of use as language is realized through texts and meaning emerges as a result of interactions within those texts.

Previous studies used systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as their framework to analyze teachers' talk in their classes. For instance, Rodrigues and Thompson (2001) investigated textual cohesion in two science classes. The degree of cohesion was estimated by a cohesive harmony index. The results showed that there should be a balance in the use of cohesion devices in teachers' talk as both excessive and inadequate use of them may hinder comprehension. The researchers argued that lack of cohesion may make it impossible for learners to comprehend a text while overuse of cohesive devices can make a text look pedantic. Additionally, Young and Nguven (2002) compared interactive teacher talk with textbooks as practices in teaching scientific subjects. Representations of physical and mental meaning, lexical packaging and rhetorical structure of reasoning were considered important elements of scientific meaning. The results showed that teacher talk included examples of grammar metaphors and both talk and textbooks used similar thematic organizations. The difference lay in the fact that teacher and students established thematic organizations through interactions. Jawahar and Dempster (2013) emphasized training on functional use of language for science English teachers. They studied teachers talk from three science teachers in an African context. The results revealed that with increasing practice ESL students, lexical cohesion increased while nominalization and lexical density did not change.

Wolf et al. (2005) examined Grade 1 to 8 students' reading comprehension. Accountable talk and academic rigor were the focus of this study. It was found that teachers talked more than students. Elicitations of students' knowledge and prompting their thinking were the dominant teacher moves. Students provided brief replies especially when faced with closed-ended questions or elicited one-word answers. Limited interactions were observed among students. In addition, a positive and strong relationship was established between accountable talk moves and the level of rigor in the observed lessons. Vaish (2008) examined Singaporean teachers' discourse. The corpus included 273 English language lessons in Primary 5 and Secondary 3 classrooms. According to results, the largest percentage of teachers' talk time for both grade levels was related to the curriculum-related teacher's talk with teacher-fronted lessons being dominant. Teachers typically used closed-ended questions and feedback moves were largely evaluative.

English teachers' directives (including eight teachers regulative discourse comprising of 32 lessons in Grade 5) were explored by Liu and Hong (2009). Large use of imperatives (62.7%) compared to declaratives (26.1%) and interrogatives (11.3%) was reported. Moreover, procedural directives (62.6%) were used more than disciplinary directives (37.4%). In conclusion, the researchers argued that there was an asymmetrical power relation between teachers and students, with teachers possessing a more powerful social position than students. Furthermore, Shintani (2013) investigated teachers' inputs and students' outputs of the target language items in classroom discourse with the purpose of examining language learning behavior. Accordingly, teachers' elicitations (either requested or optional) were the source of change in students' replies (borrowed or self-initiated). As noticed above, most studies investigating teachers' talk focused on science language teachers. Therefore, it seems rational to consider EFL teachers' talk as a valuable resource of meaning making. To accomplish this mission, this study attempted to add to the previous literature by examining teachers' talk in language classes from four Iranian EFL teachers.

### *Theme/rheme framework*

This study drew upon theme/rheme distinction in Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) textual meta-functions. Theme in English is realized by the initial position in a clause and plays the roles of topic and rheme is what

follows the theme (Flowerdew, 2013). A distinguishing feature of SFL suggested by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) is concerned with meta-function conceptualization. As suggested by Christie (2002), “the grammatical organization of all natural languages reflects the functions for which language has evolved in the human species” (p. 23). He believed that grammatical choices made in everyday discourses are negotiated and serve a particular function. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) proposed three meta-functions including ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational meta-function is concerned with knowledge representations; the interpersonal meta-function refers to the relationships between interlocutors and the textual meta-function is associated with message cohesion and coherence. As argued by Christie (2002), one purpose of text-driven grammatical analysis of English language using these meta-functions is to track how meaning is actualized and negotiated in a text. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) maintain that, though these meta-functions are enacted simultaneously in a particular discourse, they can be analyzed separately.

Theme/rheme is a system of textual meta-function which has to do with how information in a clause and a text are packaged (Flowerdew, 2013). McCarthy (as cited in Flowerdew, 2013) provided the following fuller definition:

*In English, what we what we decide to bring to the front of the clause (by whatever means) is a signal of what is to be understood as the framework within which what we say can be understood. The rest of the clause can be seen as transmitting what we want to say within this framework. Items brought to front-place we shall call the theme of their clauses. (p. 59)*

Flowerdew also (2013) argued that theme is essential to spoken and written text construction. However, he claimed that “theme in spoken language has not received as much attention in the literature” (p. 75).

#### Analytical model

An analytical model (Figure, 1) was constructed based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) and Eggins’ (2004) theoretical frameworks and was verified by five applied linguistics professors in the field for its validity. This model represented a system of textual meaning in a clause. Theme is introduced by three major systems: choice of theme type which is divided into two categories: single theme and multiple themes, theme markedness which represents both marked and unmarked themes, and a system of theme patterning that is divided into three subcategories: theme reiteration, Zig-zag pattern, and multiple-rheme pattern.

Single theme represents the topical theme of a clause. According to Eggins (2004), “when an element of the clause to which a transitivity function can be assigned occurs in the first position in a clause, we describe it as the topical theme” (p. 301). In a declarative clause, the topical theme consists of a subject (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In a Wh-interrogative clause, the topical theme includes a wh-element which begins that clause. In a yes/no interrogative clause, the finite element is considered as the interpersonal theme and the subject is the topical theme. Finally, the topical theme in an imperative clause consists of a predicator (Halliday & Matthiessen). In the theme/rheme system, the second category represents multiple themes. Multiple themes are divided into two subcategories. Here, the attitudinal subcategory is constructed from interpersonal and topical themes and the conjunctive subcategory is made up of textual and topical themes, respectively (Halliday & Matthiessen).

Markedness is the other sub-category in the theme/rheme system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). It is divided into marked and unmarked themes. According to Eggins (2004), unmarked themes are a typical/usual form of theme/rheme when, as an example, in a declarative clause, the subject occupies the theme’s position. Marked themes don’t follow simple theme rules concerning necessity for a topical theme. Eggins suggested that when a speaker selects marked theme, they are going to emphasize something in their interest. Theme patterning is the last category of this framework. Patterns of theme development make a significant contribution to the cohesion and coherence of a text (Eggins, 2004). Drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) and Eggins (2004), three patterns of theme developments adopted by the researchers are briefly described here.

A. Theme reiteration: One of the simplest ways to keep the text focused is to repeat the theme. Creative repetition is an important way to keep cohesion (Eggins, 2004). In this pattern, the same element occurs for a short period of time.

B. Zig-zag pattern: In this pattern, one element is introduced in the rheme and then the same element is used as theme of the next clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

C. Multiple-rheme pattern: In this pattern of theme development, the theme in a beginning clause introduces several elements in its rheme. Those elements are then picked up as themes in following clauses. The following figure provides patterns of theme development (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

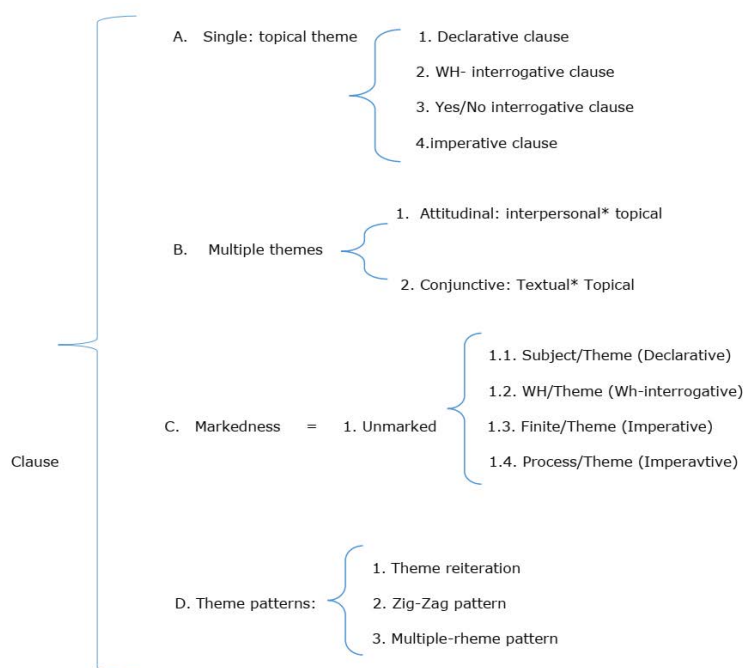


Figure 1: Theme/rhyme system constructed based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2013)

Using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2013) functional distinctions, the present study intended to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of EFL teachers' discourses. For this purpose, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1. How are simple themes incorporated in experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers' talk?

RQ2. How are multiple themes incorporated in experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers' talk?

RQ3. How are marked themes incorporated in experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers' talk?

RQ4. What are the instances of theme patterning in the talk of experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers?

## Method

### Study design

In this study, the researchers used case study as the method of data collection. Despite some limitations, i.e., generalization, case studies enjoy noteworthy strengths such as "being strong on reality" and "speaking for themselves" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 184). For the purpose of this study, teachers' talk from four English language teachers was investigated in detail. Two experienced and two inexperienced EFL teachers holding MAs in teaching English as a foreign language agreed to participate in this study. All were female teachers so as to control for the gender variable. The inexperienced language teachers had less than two years teaching experience and the experienced ones had more than five years. Teachers ranged in age 25 to 29. In order to control teachers' language proficiencies, all teachers were required to participate in a Test of Language by the Iranian Measurement Organization (TOLIMO) English test. TOLIMO is a standardized English proficiency test held bimonthly by Iranian Educational Ministry as the criterion for entering PhD courses in Iranian universities. All teachers had an MA degree in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). The participants in this study scored higher than 600 in TOLIMO test and based on the scoring criterion, they were categorized as advanced language candidates.

### Data collection

Before any discussion on data collection and analysis procedures, it should be noted that a pilot study was conducted on a smaller scale (one teacher). In this study, all teachers taught similar grammatical topics taken

from similar book chapters. The units included simple past, present perfect and conditionals. Data were collected using video recordings of six sessions for each teacher by an experienced cameraman. The teachers took their intact classes to participate in the study to avoid teaching new students and maintain students’ familiarity with their methodology.

Each teacher’s class was videotaped for ten sessions taking nearly five hours. Totally, the researcher collected 31 hours of videos for four teachers. These included 1,246 independent clauses. There were 541 simple sentences, 378 compound sentences and 218 complex sentences. The data was transcribed using the MAXQDA software. As the purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of pedagogic talk in the language classroom, nuanced details of teachers’ talk including pedagogical, disciplinary, and administrative issues were considered in data transcription without adding to or removing anything from it. It should be noted that an equal number of independent clauses for the experienced and inexperienced teachers were transcribed and analyzed. Before collecting data and making videos of the classes, informed consents were obtained from all the participating individuals.

Data analysis

The experienced and inexperienced teachers’ talk were compared for patterns of negotiating meanings. Independent and dependent clauses were considered as analysis units. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), “the clause is the central processing unit in the lexicogrammar – in the specific sense that it is in the clause that meanings of different kinds are mapped into an integrated grammatical structure” (p. 10). The researchers used typographic conventions suggested by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) for the structural analysis. All data were coded by another PhD in applied linguistics who was trained to code samples of classroom discourse based on the systemic functional framework as shown in Figures 1 and 2. To investigate whether there was agreement between the coders, an inter-coder agreement test was used. The inter-coder agreement showed a coefficient of 0.86 using Cohen's kappa. To find significant differences in the use of various elements in teachers’ talk, the researchers used Chi-square test. The data were analyzed using SPSS software.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive and statistical analysis for simple theme

To answer the first research question, researchers investigated simple themes’ use in teachers’ talk, including declarative, interrogative, wh-question, and imperative clauses. The following Table provides examples of these in the experienced and inexperienced teachers’ talk.

Experienced Teacher	Inexperienced teacher
<u>Declarative clause</u> <i>The grammar point is discussing about a relative pronoun [sic]</i> <i>These relative pronouns can connect two sentence</i>	<u>Declarative clause</u> <i>I will discuss about the required and optional relative pronouns</i> <i>We bring this right after the pronoun</i>
<u>Interrogative clause:</u> <i>Is it needed to omit which?</i> <i>Do you know passive?</i>	<u>Interrogative clause:</u> <i>Is it correct?</i> <i>Are you sure?</i>
<u>Wh-question clause:</u> <i>When is it?</i> <i>How can I turn it into passive?</i>	<u>Wh-question clause:</u> <i>When we use these three pronouns? [sic]</i> <i>Which one is the second subject?</i>
<u>Imperative clause:</u> <i>Open page 55 please.</i> <i>Look at your book please</i>	<u>Imperative clause:</u> <i>Make an example</i> <i>Think about it</i>

\* Note. Examples are provided in italics

Table 1: Examples of simple theme subcategories for the experienced and inexperienced teachers

Regarding the declarative clauses, mostly, nominal phrases including grammatical categories such as active verb, passive verb, conditional, etc. were assigned as the topical theme. This represented old information in the theme so teachers provided new information in the rheme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Declarative clauses are mainly used as a tool to state something. As illustrated in Table 1, teachers used the grammar point, these relative pronouns, I, and we as the topical themes in these declarative sentences. In these cases, they employed a declarative sentence to talk about content (grammar points) and procedure (how they are



constructed). This was in line with Liu and Hong's (2009) results that teachers used directives both for procedural and disciplinary purposes.

Questioning strategies in the language classroom are different from strategies in everyday life exchanges (Markee, 2000). Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) contend that interrogative clauses are constructed in the form of polarity "yes" and "no" clauses used to confirm aforementioned information. To search for the missing information, individuals can use wh-clauses. This classification is in line with Long and Sato's (1983) classification where display questions are exemplified in the form of interrogative questions and referential questions are embodied in terms of wh-questions. As expected, the majority of questions posed by the experienced and inexperienced teachers in this study were concerned with the subject matter. As indicated in the above table, Do you know passive? and How can I turn it into passive?, were questions used to elicit information from the students about some grammar points. This was in line with Vaish's (2008) qualitative transcripts analysis, according to which, teachers' questions were typically closed-ended and feedback moves were largely evaluative.

Moreover, imperative clauses can be used by the teachers to bring order to the language classroom. Investigation of teachers' talk showed that both teachers used an imperative, open page 55 please or make an example, to tell the students what to do. Examples of different categories of simple themes used in the discourse of experienced and inexperienced teachers were provided above. The following Table provides descriptive results for simple themes.

		Simple Theme				Total
		Declarative	Interrogative	Wh-question	Imperative	
Teacher	Inexperienced	675	11	159	180	1025
	Experienced	534	75	80	42	731

Table 2: Teachers' simple theme descriptive statistics

As demonstrated in Table 2, the total number of simple themes used by the inexperienced teachers was higher than that of their experienced colleagues. The results showed that the inexperienced teachers used 675 declaratives, 11 interrogatives, 159 wh-questions and 180 imperatives while the experienced teachers used 534, 75, 80 and 42 clauses, respectively. Except for the interrogative clause, results showed higher use of other classes by the inexperienced teachers.

In this study, the teachers employed declarative clauses to explain a topic or answer a particular question. Higher use of them by the inexperienced teachers can show that they were devoting a higher share of classroom time to themselves explaining and discussing different topics. Based on these results, the inexperienced teachers were more interested in using wh-questions to pose new questions. This way, they required learners to provide an opinion or explain and clarify something. The experienced teachers' inclination to use more interrogative questions is rooted in their desire to elicit learners' prior knowledge (showing that students know somethings about the topic at hand) and check comprehension (asking them to follow the discussion).

Stark differences in the use of imperative clause by the experienced and inexperienced teachers may provide us with the fact that these teachers practiced different strategies to bring order to their classroom. Higher use of imperatives by the inexperienced teachers may be indicative of their willingness to address learners from a top down and authoritative stance. The following Table illustrates chi-square results for the experienced and inexperienced teachers' use of simple themes. This test is used to compare frequencies of observations between the two groups. If the frequencies are not based on chance, the test will provide statistically significant results.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	87.890 <sup>a</sup>	3	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.73.

Table 3: Chi-square test

Results of the chi-square test for differences between the experienced and inexperienced teachers' use of simple themes showed a significant difference ( $P < .05$ ). This way, the researchers concluded that the frequency of simple themes used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers were different.

Descriptive and statistical results for interpersonal theme

The researchers found examples of interpersonal themes in the talks of both groups of teachers. The interpersonal themes consist of finite, mood, vocative, polarity and comment adjuncts. Some examples are provided in the following Table.

Finite as interpersonal Theme <i>Do you give blood?</i> <i>Can you take my bag for me?</i>	Do= interpersonal Theme You= topical Theme Can= interpersonal Theme You= topical Theme
Mood adjunct as interpersonal Theme <i>I think they take a pint</i> <i>Maybe Stephan could help</i>	I think= interpersonal Theme They= topical Theme Maybe= interpersonal Theme Stephan= topical Theme
Vocative adjunct as interpersonal Theme <i>Simon, isn't that where they put the needle in?</i> <i>Stephan, do you want more soup?</i>	Simon= interpersonal Theme Isn't= finite That= topical Theme Stephan= interpersonal Theme Do= finite You= topical Theme
Polarity adjunct as interpersonal Theme <i>No/yes, yea, yep, na, nope</i>	Polarity adjuncts=interpersonal Theme
Comment adjunct as interpersonal Theme <i>Fortunately, the bomb didn't explode</i> <i>Honestly, it's not my business</i>	Fortunately, interpersonal Theme The bomb= topical Theme Honestly= interpersonal Theme It= topical Theme

\* Note. Examples are provided in italics

Table 4: Examples of interpersonal themes used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers

Examples of finite as the interpersonal theme were provided in the last section when the researchers were explaining interrogative clauses. Polarity is the element used to express finiteness (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). It is used to make a clause arguable by specifying positivity and negativity. Here, the researchers are concerned with the polarity adjuncts. Yes and No are used at the beginning of a clause to show positivity or negativity. As argued by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), “in using a vocative, the speaker is enacting the participation of the addressee or addressees in the exchange.” (p. 159). The teachers used vocative adjuncts to address a particular person or to attract students’ attention. Mood “carries the burden of the clause as an interactive event” (Halliday, 1985, p. 77). In this analysis, modality refers to degrees of indeterminacy. Teachers used modality to provide some hedges on their discourse. The comment adjuncts “express the speaker’s attitude either to the proposition as a whole or to the particular speech function” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 129). They were used by teachers to show their attitude or evaluation of a particular subject.

The cases reported here illustrated use of interpersonal themes by the experienced and inexperienced teachers. Descriptive statistics of these themes are provided in the following Table.

		Interpersonal					Total
		Finite	Mood	Vocative	Polarity	Comment	
Teacher	Inexperienced	11	5	11	27	5	59
	Experienced	75	26	31	11	11	154

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for teachers interpersonal Theme use

Analysis of the experienced and inexperienced teachers’ talk showed that the experienced teachers used more interpersonal themes than the inexperienced ones. The researchers used Chi-square test to investigate the differences between these teachers’ discourses. The result of chi-square test is provided below.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.712 <sup>a</sup>	3	.001

a 0 cells (0 0%) have expected count less than 5 The minimum expected count is .75

Table 6: Chi-square test

The results of chi-square test showed a significant difference in the teachers’ talk in terms of using the interpersonal themes ( $p<.05$ ). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), an interpersonal theme is used to specify a move in the discourse, address somebody and express speaker or writers’ judgment or attitude. These are signs of interactivity in the discourse. Overall, the results supported the view that experienced teachers’ talk is more interactive than that of the inexperienced teachers. More use of interpersonal themes by the experienced teachers may also demonstrate complexity of their discourse compared to more use of simple themes by the inexperienced teachers.

Descriptive and statistical analysis for textual themes

With respect to the use of textual themes by the experienced and inexperienced teachers, some differences were pinpointed. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), a textual theme comes before a topical theme and does not affect experiential meaning of a clause. The textual theme has two subcategories of continuity adjuncts and conjunctive adjuncts. The following Table provides some examples of these themes used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers.

Inexperienced teacher	Experienced teacher
<i>Yeah you are telling the truth</i>	<i>Now again I have to omit a pronoun in the second sentence.</i>
<i>Ok. No, which type of changes have you made?</i>	<i>Now we have, right after people, we have who</i>
<i>So think about an example.</i>	<i>And which refers to object</i>
<i>But for the verb told here, we should have a predicate</i>	<i>Again I need to omit the pronoun of....</i>

\* Note. Examples are provided in italics

Table 7: Examples of use of continuative and conjunctive adjuncts by inexperienced and experienced teachers

Table 7 shows that teachers used different types of linking words to make their talk coherent. Linking words are used to connect different elements in a text and as Rodrigues and Thompson (2001) and Jawahar and Dempster (2013) argued, they are necessary for text comprehension. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), conjunctive adjuncts expressed by cohesive conjunctions, “set up a contextualizing relationship [...] between the clause as a message and some other (typically preceding) portion of text” (p. 157). Conjunctive adjuncts relate the clause to the preceding text and typically occur at the beginning of a clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In the experienced and inexperienced teachers’ talk, the most frequently used conjunctive adjuncts were and, so, but, now, because, then, if, for example, like, finally. As argued by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), a continuative adjunct “is one of a small set of words that signal a move in the discourse: a response in dialogue, or a new move to the next point if the same speaker is continuing” (p.107). The most frequent continuatives used in teachers’ talk were yes, no, well, oh, now. Descriptive statistics for textual themes are provided below.

		Textual		Total
		Continuity	Conjunctive	
Teacher	Inexperienced	114	360	474
	Experienced	24	534	558

Table 8: Teacher textual theme cross tabulation

The results of descriptive statistics demonstrated that the experienced teachers used more textual themes than the inexperienced teachers. To examine this difference statistically, the researchers used chi-square test. The results are provided below.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.712 <sup>a</sup>	3	.001

Table 9: Chi-square test

The chi-square test results showed a significant difference between the experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of textual themes use. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), textual themes are mainly employed to rhetorically or logically orient a clause within a particular discourse, set up a relationship



with what precedes and follow and provide an anchorage for the clause in the discourse. According to the authors, use or more use of these elements can “complete the thematic grounding of a message” (p. 112). This way, the researchers argued that more use of textual themes by the experienced teachers showed a higher level of cohesion and coherence in their discourse which, in turn, may enhance students’ comprehension and learning of materials.

#### *Descriptive and statistical analysis for marked themes*

Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) maintained that a typical clause is made up of a subject, an interrogative, a wh-question or an imperative as its topical theme. These are the examples of unmarked themes. When one of these elements is not positioned as the theme of a clause, everything which occupies this position is considered to play the role of a marked theme. According to the authors, marked themes are used to emphasize a particular element in a clause. Table 9 delineates some cases of marked themes used by the teachers.

Inexperienced teacher	Experienced teacher
A. <i>Today</i> we are going to talk about relative pronouns	A. <i>In this page</i> we are going to discuss about grammar point
B. <i>But for the verb told here</i> we should have some predicate	B. <i>But in both of these sentences</i> there is one word in common
C. <i>But like who</i> we should omit the subject of the second sentence	C. <i>So for the second sentence</i> I omit the subject
D. <i>This time</i> we made a correct sentence	D. <i>Here</i> I have a man

\* Note. Examples are provided in italics

Table 10: Examples of marked themes used by the teacher

Marked themes can be utilized in every stage of teachers’ discourse. For instance, consider Example A in the experienced teachers’ talk. It occurs at the beginning of class time and the teacher asked for students’ attention as she was starting to teach. In this case, she started the clause with *in this page* to indicate the lesson’s commencement. Like the experienced teachers, one of the inexperienced teachers started a clause with the time adjunct, *today*, to begin the lesson and ask for students’ attention. According to Eggins (2004), when a marked theme is incorporated in a text, the speaker or writer intends to highlight a specific point. For instance, in the above examples, the inexperienced teachers highlighted time (example A), context (Example B), subject (Example C) and time (Example D). On the other hand, the experienced teachers emphasized location (Example A), subject (Example B), subject (Example C) and condition (Example D). Descriptive statistics for marked themes are provided below.

		Marked
Teacher	Inexperienced	45
	Experienced	252
Total		297

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for marked themes

As illustrated in Table 10, the number of marked themes used by the experienced teachers is more than the number for the inexperienced teachers. To examine if the difference is statistically significant or not, the researchers used a Chi-square test. The results are provided below.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	106.762 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000

Table 12: Chi-square test

The difference between the experienced and inexperienced teachers’ talk regarding the providence of marked themes was statistically significant. Eggins (2004) argued that writers and speakers can use marked themes to add coherence and emphasis to their discourse. Therefore, as higher use of marked themes was detected in the experienced teachers’ talk, the researchers concluded that their talk was more coherent and they paid more attention to their audience.

#### *Patterns of theme development in the experienced and inexperienced teachers’ discourse*

Theme is considered as an element which provides texture. According to Halliday (1985), textual meaning “is relevance to the context: both the preceding and following text and the context of situation” (p. 53). Various

theme development patterns have been suggested by different authors to deliver a text which is coherent. In this study, based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) and Eggins (2004), the researchers investigated occurrence of three theme patterns in discourses of the experienced and inexperienced teachers. Table 12 provides examples of theme patternings. Descriptive analysis of results for the inexperienced teachers showed that they used reiteration (N= 81) and zig-zag (N= 60) patterns in their talk to negotiate their meaning. Concerning the inexperienced teachers, the researchers were not able to find examples of multiple-rheme patterning in their discourse. Some examples illustrating applications of these two theme types by the inexperienced teachers are provided below. These results may be important as showing that the experienced teachers' talk in the language classroom is more complicated than the inexperienced teachers' talk.

Theme reiteration:	
A. Then we are going to mix these two sentences together with the help of a relative pronoun. We write the first sentence: (I saw a man yesterday), then we use who instead of he [sic].	<i>In example A on the left, We is the topical Theme in all three sentences and repeated there.</i>
B. So we use who to connect two sentences and we omit the subject of the second sentence, we replace it with who and then we bring the rest of the second sentence after who. So we are going to speak about which [sic].	<i>As you can see in example B, again We is used as the topical Theme which is repeated in several sentences.</i>
Zig-zag pattern:	
A. Up to now we were talking about the subject pronouns, those pronouns that come in place of the subject of the sentence [sic].	<i>In this example, as you see in the first clause subjects pronouns are placed in the Rheme part of it while in the second clause, those pronouns are placed in the topical Theme position.</i>
B. But for the verb told here we should have some predicate, something that you should talk about.	<i>As you see here, some predicate which is placed in the Rheme part of our first clause, is put in the topical Theme position in the second clause.</i>
C. Then we are going to connect these two sentences. These two sentences which we don't have a human being in them and we are talking about an object which is a photo and a house here [sic].	<i>In this example as the two above, the element which is placed in the Rheme part of the first clause is used as the topical Theme of the second clause.</i>

Table 13: Examples of use of theme reiteration and zig-zag pattern by inexperienced teachers

According to Eggins (2004), theme reiteration is used to keep a text cohesive. In this way, the writer or speaker repeats the theme he or she has proposed in the previous clauses in order to focus on one element and bring it to the fore. For example, consider example B in reiteration section in the inexperienced teachers' talk. In this example, the teacher is explaining linking two sentences using relative pronouns. The teacher used, we, for a short while in consecutive clauses to focus on action, i.e., doer, of linking two sentences and steps which should be taken by learners to link these two sentences. This was in line with Halliday & Matthiessen's (2013) argument that, in conversations, personal pronouns tend to be preferred as the theme. Therefore, by selecting a personal pronoun, teachers can enhance texts' cohesiveness by focusing on one element in a text and repeating that element in a particular section of the text. Eggins (2004) argued that repetition can increase cohesiveness of a text. However, there is a problem with theme reiteration. As suggested by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), a large percent of theme reiteration in a text may lead to a monotonous and boring flow of discourse. For this purpose, the inexperienced teachers used a zig-zag pattern erratically to avoid this monotony. Although the number of theme reiterations used in the inexperienced teachers' discourse outnumbered the zig-zag pattern, this sporadic use of zig-zag pattern could improve dynamicity of their talk.

The zig-zag pattern was used by the inexperienced teachers to talk about an element which was introduced in the rheme, i.e., new information, of the previous sentence. For example, consider example A in table 12. The teacher was talking about subject pronouns for the class. In the first sentence, the phrase, subject pronoun, is placed in the rheme. However, in the second clause, the teacher moved an equivalent for the subject pronoun, namely those pronouns, to the theme position so as to change the discussion's focus and highlight it. In this way, the inexperienced teachers remained to the point on the topic of interest. These patterns also occurred in the experienced teachers' talk. As far as reiteration and zig-zag patterns are concerned, both groups of teachers benefited from them. In spite of that, there was a noteworthy difference between the experienced and inexperienced teachers' talks which should be taken into account. The researchers were able to find examples of multiple-rheme patterning in discourse of the experienced teachers. The examples are provided below.

Theme reiteration	
<p>A. again I need to omit the pronoun of the second sentence. I start writing with the first sentence. I say: "this is a man", now I don't omit the subject position [sic]</p> <p>B. we can omit them, because we have object after them. So because we have object right after the relative pronoun, either in the case of human or object we can omit here [sic].</p> <p>C. you two work on number 1 to number 4, and you two work on number 5 to number 8, you two work on number 1 to number 4. [sic]</p>	<p>As you can see in this example, our teacher is teaching about the relative pronoun and use the pronoun I to describe the lesson for students.</p> <p>In this example also we can see the repetition of We as our Topical Theme</p> <p>In this example, our clauses are in the imperative mood so the verb Work is repeated as the topical Theme</p>
Zig-zag pattern	
<p>A. now open page 81. in this page we are going to discuss about the grammar, that is passive one. [sic]</p> <p>B. sometimes we have pronoun in the subject position, that is in common with the first sentence.</p> <p>C. photo for the first sentence is in common with it in the second, but this it is on the object position</p>	<p>In this example we have consecutive Zig-zag pattern where in the first clause Page 81 is placed in the Rheme position while in the second clause it is placed in the topical Theme position and in this clause, The grammar is placed in the Rheme position and in the next clause it is placed in the topical Theme position.</p> <p>In this example, the word Pronoun which is in the Rheme part of the first clause, is placed in the topical Theme position of the second clause.</p> <p>In this example like the ones above, the bold element is placed in the Rheme position of the first clause while the italic element is placed in the topical Theme position of the second clause.</p>
Multiple-Rheme pattern	
<p>A. look at the grammar box. It divides the grammar explanation into three parts. For the first part, it says that ..... The second part refers to alternative therapies that help fight stress on the rise. For the third part, the final part of grammar, we have object of clause.</p> <p>B. in English we usually have a timeline. In the timeline, we discuss about past, present and future. .... For the past, we have simple past. .... For the present, just like the past, we have simple present .....</p> <p>C. what about the past progressive, present progressive and present perfect? For the past progressive for the active form we have was and were plus verb with ing. for present progressive we have am, is, are again plus verb with ing. for present perfect for the active present perfect we have or has plus past participle. [sic]</p>	<p>As you see in the above example, in the Rheme of the second clause we have into three part. These three parts are introduced one by one in the following clauses, each of them being placed in the topical Theme position.</p> <p>About the future, we use simple future to .....</p> <p>In this example our Experienced teacher is talking about the grammar of time in English. She divides the time into three components in the Rheme of second clause and then she describes about two of them in the following clauses.</p> <p>As you see in this example, the point of departure is again time in English grammar. The teacher divides this time into three parts and explains for each of them separately.</p>

Table 14: Examples of use of Theme reiteration by experienced teachers

The experienced teachers used reiteration (N= 138), zig-zag (N= 80) and multiple-rheme pattern (N= 38) in their discourse. These results indicate that the experienced teachers' talk was more complicated than the inexperienced teachers' talk in both quantity and quality. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), the most compelling element in development of a text is its thematic organization. They argued that for cohesion and coherence, a text should follow a type of theme patterning that is recognized by its reader or listener. The experienced teachers used multiple-rheme pattern in their discourse. This pattern can be used to talk about a topic which is constructed from various branches. Therefore, the speaker or writer can introduce main topics in

the theme of beginning sentences and enumerates its branches in the rheme. Then, the rheme will be divided into different themes in the following sentences or paragraphs to provide a sense of unity for the whole text.

This model of theme patterning can be very applicable in teaching English grammar as most grammatical topics in English are made up of different branches (for example, when a teacher intends to teach conditional sentences in English, he or she can define conditional sentences in the theme and then introduce different types of conditional sentences in the rheme). In the experienced teachers' talk in this study, the researchers found many examples of multiple-rheme patterns for teaching tenses (present, past, future), conditionals (type 1, type 2, type 3), progressives, etc. This can be related to Martin and Rose's (2007) concept of hypertheme and macrotheme. They argued that we can expand the level of theme development towards the whole paragraph by assigning a broad theme to the first sentence and describing it in the next sentences (hypertheme). According to Martin and Rose (2007), hypertheme institutes the field of discourse, i.e., its subject matter. Ravelli (2004) demonstrated that in a writing class, texts produced by learners will be more convincing as far as, "they can predict where they are going, flag where they are and reiterate where they have been" (p. 104).

On the other hand, they argued that a speaker or writer can assign a theme as a topic of discourse and talk or write about it in details (macrotheme). The results of using multiple-rheme patterns by the experienced teachers may show that their talk was more dynamic and less monotonous compared to the inexperienced teachers' talk. Moreover, this may show that the experienced teachers had a more comprehensive mental image of what they were going to teach and were able to provide material coherently for their learners. Further, these results may confirm that the experienced teachers, consciously or unconsciously, were aware of various styles of developing and presenting a subject matter.

## Conclusion

This study provides some insights on the nature of experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers' talk in grammar classes. The results indicated that, in general, the experienced and inexperienced teachers' talks were constructed from different functional structures. Moreover, these results showed that experience may play a determining role in EFL teachers' teaching practice. Moreover, the results demonstrated that the experienced teachers' talk was more elaborate than the inexperienced teachers' talk. The results can be summarized as follow:

- The inexperienced teachers used simpler themes than the experienced teachers.
- The experienced teachers used more interpersonal themes compared to the inexperienced teachers
- The experienced teachers used more textual themes compared to the inexperienced teachers
- The quality and quantity of themes patterns were richer in discourse of the experienced teachers compared to the inexperienced teachers.

## Implications of the study

The results of this study may have the following implications:

- Inexperienced teachers' talk may be constructed from simpler elements compared to experienced teachers' talk during teaching of grammar in an English class
- Experienced teachers' talk may be more interactive and dynamic in a language class compared to inexperienced teachers' talk
- Experienced teachers enjoy higher cohesion and coherence in their talk compared to inexperienced teachers
- Experienced teachers may be able to provide their instructional material in a less monotonous and more systematic way compared to inexperienced teachers
- Experienced teachers may have a more thorough and well-established picture of the materials they are intending to present to learners

This study has some implications for classroom discourse practitioners.

First, experience should be considered as a leading factor in the process of teaching language skills, grammar, in this case. Using data from experienced language teachers' classroom talk, teacher educators can help prospective and novice teachers to develop their practice in the language classroom.

Second, it should be noted that as the experienced and inexperienced teachers used different elements in their discourses to negotiate meaning, they have socialized students differently in the process of learning. Therefore,



students of experienced and inexperienced teachers should be expected to hold different understandings of a particular subject and this important fact should be considered in their evaluations.

Then, discourse analysts can utilize SFL as an effective tool for providing a rich and comprehensive description of language teaching and learning processes. SFL can help us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between teachers' language use and learners' learning. In addition, curriculum developers can use data from experienced and inexperienced teachers' discourse to provide learners with different models of presenting materials. Teacher educators can provide some guidelines for language teachers on how to produce a more cohesive and coherent discourse as more control of theme development may enhance efficiency of teaching and learning processes. Besides, this study highlighted the importance of discourse-based approaches for language teaching.

### Limitations of the study

This study has its own limitations. Although we did not aim at generalization, future studies can target a larger group of participants so as to generalize the findings. Language teacher experience is not clearly defined in the literature. Future researchers can select teachers with different language teaching backgrounds to provide a more elaborate conceptualization of experience. Last but not the least, accompanying analytical data by data from teachers' cognition can strengthen and validate obtained results and conclusions.

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