Inside the Classroom: Teacher and Student Questions in a Foreign Language Literature Class

Dogan Yuksel

Kocaeli University, Turkey

Miao Yu

Florida State University, USA

The significance of questioning practices in classroom interaction has been acknowledged for some time (Long & Sato, 1983; Mehan, 1979; White & Lightbown, 1984). Questioning exchanges dominate classroom interactions in many settings (Nystrand, 2004; Wilhelm, 2005). However, most of the previous studies that focus on questions refer only to the different characteristics of teacher questions (e.g., their types and number). The contextual factors and social aspects of teacher questions and the different characteristics of student questions have not been addressed adequately in previous studies. To fill this gap in the literature, in this study, we examined the nature of teacher and student questions in a foreign language literature class in a Turkish university. We address both pedagogical and social implications of questioning practices in a foreign language classroom from a Bakhtinian/Vygotskyan sociocultural theory (SCT) perspective.

Sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of participation to language acquisition (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Sfard, 1998; Wells, 1999), has been advanced as an alternative to the psycholinguistic perspective in classroom discourse studies (Platt & Brooks, 1994, 2002; Ohta, 2000) in the field of second and foreign language learning. Ellis (1987) states that research from a *psycholinguistic perspective* reduces second language constructs (e.g., recasts, questions) into codeable, isolated and distinct items, and examines these constructs without considering the effects of contextual factors. In other words, a psycholinguistic perspective justifies the study of learner utterances in isolation from their social context.

On the other hand, studies that follow an SCT approach examine language as a developmental process within a social context (Van der Aalsvoort & Harinck, 2000). SCT prioritizes a qualitative research methodology by paying "close attention to the settings and participants in interactions" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p. 403). More specifically, research from an SCT perspective examines second language development

by giving special attention to contextual factors. It highlights the importance of the social environment in the analysis of human behavior to reflect human experiences as comprehensively as possible (Foster & Ohta, 2005).

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that teachers dominate the talk in literature classrooms and ask almost all of the questions (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Mantero, 2001). Nystrand (1997) argues that by asking some specific types of questions, teachers might impede or take control of classroom discussions. Therefore, research on types and frequency of teacher questions may provide insights about the direction of discussions, the type of discourse teachers envision in their minds, and how classroom discourse can be administered.

For this study, teacher questions were categorized into three groups, namely, authentic, test, and non-classified. Authentic questions are asked to get indeterminate answers from students, not to check whether they know or do not know particular content (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). By their nature, authentic questions are open for multiple interpretations and they allow a range of possible responses. Socially, they imply a teacher's interest in what students think or know (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). On the other hand, test questions allow only one possible answer, which is probably already known by the asker. They also help teachers (a) check if students did their assigned homework, and (b) reinforce key points. Socially, as Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) argue, test questions "concentrate control of classroom discourse in one actor—the teacher" (p. 145), and leave no room for student voices in the classroom discourse. Non-classified questions, which emerged during data coding for this study, were ones that did not specifically inquire about the texts being studied.

Compared with the extensive research on teacher questions, student questions have not received much attention (Hsu, 2001; McGrew, 2005; Pearson & West, 1991). This may be due to the fact that the default inquirers in many classroom settings are teachers (Cazden, 2001), and the main role of students in questioning processes is to answer teacher questions. According to Nystrand et al. (2003), student questions signal engagement and affect the teacher's control of classroom discourse positively. Students may assume power and control over classroom discourse while asking questions. Therefore, a shift of roles in the questioning sequence may imply an important change of the social dynamics in the classroom.

In one of the few studies that focus on categories of student questions, McGrew (2005) examined student questions in a low-intermediate level modern Hebrew class. He analyzed the discourse patterns of the questions and identified four categories of student questions: lexical, grammatical, meta-pedagogical, and substantive. He concluded that student questions were signs of conscious attempts at language learning.

Based on the data we collected and previous literature concerning teacher (Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Brock, 1986; Cintorino, 1994; Nystrand et al., 2003) and student questions (McGrew, 2005; Skilton & Meyer, 1993), we grouped student questions into five categories: lexical, procedural, hypothesis testing, referential, and challenge questions. *Lexical questions* inquire about a specific word or information that students do not know in the target language. *Procedural questions* are used for the management of classroom routines. *Hypothesis testing* questions signal attempts of students to reconcile new information with their existing knowledge about the texts they read. *Referential questions* focus on some unclear issues in the target readings and ask for some more clarification and/or advancement of the understandings of the readings. *Challenge questions* are posed when the students disagree with the instructor's personal comments beyond the target readings.

Setting and Participants

We employed a purposeful sampling method. The participants were advanced level English education majors attending a Turkish public university. We were particularly interested in advanced level learners because they had adequate English proficiency and the necessary background in literature to carry out classroom discussions in the target language. The course chosen for the study was sixth semester drama analysis and teaching. The instructor was a native speaker of Turkish who held a PhD in English literature from a prestigious Turkish university. She had been teaching this course for more than 10 years, and she is one of the most academically active members of the faculty. She has a strong academic background in language teaching and learning theories. Although the teacher's speech excerpts illustrated in the findings are sometimes non-target-like, we believe that this may have stemmed from the spontaneity of the classroom context rather than a lack of English proficiency of the teacher.

The number of participants varied from 25-32 during nine weeks of recordings. This was because some students who could not attend other sections were allowed to attend the one being observed even though they were not enrolled in that specific section. During the first week of the course, 26 students signed the consent forms and filled out student background questionnaires. Out of these 26 students, 3 of them were male, and 23 were female. The background survey indicated that the participants ranged in age from 20 to 22, and they had been studying English for 5 to 12 years. This demographic information, according to our previous experiences, reflected the typical situation of English education programs in Turkish universities.

The purposeful selection of the setting and participants was based on the following reasons: (a) convenient and efficient access to the research site, (b) the instructor and

other participants were willing to participate in the study, and (c) the frequency of classroom discussions in this particular instructor's literature class was high.

Methodology

By employing qualitative data collection and qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, this case study examined the nature of teacher and student questions in a literature class. The main aim of the study was to understand the nature of questioning processes during literature discussions. Therefore, all class sessions in one semester were video-recorded, and the data were transcribed verbatim using a discourse analysis method. Video recordings enabled us to observe the subtle intricacies of academic and social dynamics during classroom discussions in a systematic, comprehensive, and thorough way. We also took fieldnotes during our observations and conducted interviews with the instructor and students to augment and triangulate the data. Moreover, quantitative analysis of the findings were provided to (a) make the findings more reader friendly, (b) explain why we have drawn particular inferences from the data (Mackey & Gass, 2005), and (c) help us identify the trends extracted from the data analysis.

Data Coding

Following procedures outlined by Forman, McCormick, and Donato (1993), we marked utterances as questions using the following criteria: (a) rising intonation, (b) syntax, (c) the occurrence of WH-words, and/or (d) whether the utterance signaled that a reply was assumed. After we determined the questions, we grouped them as teacher or student questions depending on who asked them. We further classified teacher questions into three categories, namely test questions {TQ-T}, authentic questions {TQ-A}, and non-classified questions {TQ-N}. Student questions were grouped under five categories: hypothesis testing questions, procedural questions, referential questions, lexical questions, and challenge questions.

Reliability of the Coding

The first author coded each question based on the definitions explained earlier and examples of the question types. To ensure the reliability of our coding, we numbered all of our transcripts and randomly selected 20% of them through a random number generator provided at http://random.org. Based on the random numbers provided, the second author coded teacher questions in 10% of the data and an external rater coded the other 10%. We also prepared a training manual that included the definitions of each type of question with at least two examples. After the external rater read the training manual, we went over some portions of the transcripts together. There was 96%

consistency in the coding of the teacher questions between the first and second authors, and 90% consistency between the first author and the external rater. Regarding the student questions, the first and second authors coded and categorized all of them together.

Emergence of Non-Classified Questions

For this study, we focused on the discussions in an American literature class in Turkey. Both authentic and test questions were asked by the teacher during literary discussions while participants were talking about the texts they read. Both types of questions inquired about the texts specifically. While coding teacher questions, we came across some other questions that did not specifically inquire about the texts. These questions involved (a) questions about classroom management, (b) rhetorical questions, (c) questions in which the teacher did not wait for an answer, but answered them herself, and (d) confirmation checks. We grouped these questions under the category of non-classified teacher questions because they were not directly related to the content of the texts read. We did not analyze non-classified questions in detail.

Findings

Teacher Questions

In the classes observed, the instructor asked 1,607 questions during nine weeks of recordings. On average, she asked a question every 26.4 seconds during literature discussions. The numbers of questions changed from week to week. On average, the instructor asked 178 questions each week. In Week Three, she asked only 96 questions; however, in Week Five she asked 235 questions during three hours of class sessions. We did not observe any specific patterns in the delivery of the questions throughout the semester. When non-classified questions were excluded, percentages of authentic (48%) and test (52%) questions were quite close. Table 1 demonstrates the numbers of types of teacher questions and their frequency in each week.

Table 1

Numbers of Types of Teacher Questions in Each Week

Week	TQ-A	TQ-T	TQ-N	Total	Seconds/ Question
1	80	78	67	225	26
2	56	71	55	182	35
3	31	40	24	95	21

Table 1 (continued).

Numbers of Types of Teacher Questions in Each Week

Week	TQ-A	TQ-T	TQ-N	Total	Seconds/ Question
4	72	70	51	193	26
5	100	76	59	235	23
6	63	50	54	167	33
7	69	63	59	191	25
8	28	67	37	132	21
9	51	81	55	187	28
TOTAL	550	596	389	1607	

Authentic Questions

Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) define an authentic question as "a question for which the asker has not pre-specified an answer" (p. 38). Open-ended questions with indeterminate answers were included in this category as well. A question was coded {TQ-A} when (a) it had more than one possible answer, (b) it asked about something unknown by the teacher, (c) it asked about students' opinions. Excerpt 1 in Table 3 illustrates the examples of authentic teacher questions. We also provide the key for the transcription conventions used in this study in Table 2.

Table 2

Key to Reading the Transcripts

Symbol	Meaning
T	Teacher turns
S1, S2, S3, S4	Student turns
[ ]	Extra information
(+)	Pause ("+" indicates the number of seconds)
[	Overlapping speech
]	
[Tr.]	Utterances in Turkish
Luke, Clan, Yank, Mary, John, etc.	Character names in the plays
[?]	Unclear or unidentified transcription

Table 3

Excerpt 1: Examples of Authentic Questions

01	T	In your daily life (+) suppose you are teenagers and you are in secondary high school (+) and you wake up. **Could you please tell me your daily life (+) in a Turkish culture? (++) You wake up and then what do you do?** {TQ-A}
02	SS	Breakfast
03	T	Yes, you have breakfast. **Who prepares breakfast? You? Your mother?** {TQ-A}
04	S1	My mother
05	T	Wonderful, <u>what else?</u> {TQ-A} **Your mother prepares and does she say you something while you are eating?** {TQ-A}

In this excerpt, there were four teacher questions and all of them were coded as authentic questions. All of these questions asked about students' activities in their daily lives and had potentially different answers based on each student. Also, the questions inquired about students' daily activities that were unknown to the teacher. Another interesting feature of this excerpt is the context in which it occurred. This excerpt took place at the beginning of the first lesson in Week Five, and we inferred that the instructor was trying to relate the text to the real-world lives of the students by asking this type of question. Some other functions of the authentic teacher questions were to (a) ask students to make global connections between and within the texts, (b) elicit more frequent and multifaceted student responses, and (c) help students develop new thoughts based on the readings. Authentic questions also served social functions such as opening the floor to different student ideas, empowering their voices, and encouraging more student contribution during classroom discussions.

Test Questions

Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) offer the following definition of test questions: "Test questions are asked to review basic information which has generally only one correct answer" (p. 38). A question was coded as a {TQ-T} when it (a) had one pre-specified (fixed) answer, (b) asked about something already known by the teacher, (c) asked about something clearly stated in the text, (d) was asked to check if the students correctly remembered what they read. Excerpt 2 in Table 4 illustrates examples of test questions.

Table 4

Excerpt 2: Examples of Test Questions

01	T	After Luke and Clan, this time we are at home, now from the street we entered the homes. **We have a married couple, Mary and John, what's the problem here?** {TQ-T}
02	S1	Baby is crying.
03	T	Yes, baby is crying but?
04	S1	Mother cannot do (+) cannot stop the baby.
05	T	Why not? {TQ-A}
06	S1	Because she does not know the (++) her own baby always (+) the maid (+) a black woman helps.
07	T	**Who is she?** {TQ-T}
08	S1	She is babysitter.
09	T	Not babysitter
10	S2	Nanny

In this excerpt, in Turn 1, the teacher was inquiring about specific information which had been clearly stated in the text and which was, most probably, already known by her. Based on classroom observations, we interpreted that this question was asked to check whether the students had read the texts and come to class well prepared. Therefore, the teacher question in Turn 1 was coded as a test question, as was the second question in this excerpt (Turn 7). Most of the time, in the classes we observed, test questions aimed to (a) establish background information about the literary texts, (b) check if the students had read their assigned texts, and (c) review the essential information about the texts to initiate higher-level discussions. Besides these academic functions, we interpreted the test questions as tools that helped the teacher strictly control the discourse of the classroom. When test questions were abundant, the students' voices were silenced. Their opinions were not valued and they were asked to parrot either what the teacher said previously or information from the assigned reading. In other words, they were not given the opportunity to express their individual thoughts. .

Importance of the Context

One significant feature of coding teacher questions was the identification of context. As Foster and Ohta (2005) argue, inclusion of contextual analysis is a necessary component of studies that follow an SCT perspective. Skilton and Meyer (1993) suggest that close attention should be paid to the context in which each question is asked because form does not always imply function. In other words, utterances worded as questions might function as expressives, or questions that have the same form may be placed in

different categories depending on the context in which they were asked. Therefore, we identified the major class activities to provide a context to each question, and referred to the major class activity when we had problems determining the type of teacher question. There were five activities during teacher-fronted, whole group literary discussions. Of these five activities, the instructor asked more authentic questions during background information and post-review activities. On the other hand, character analysis, literary movements, and theme analysis activities involved more test questions. In Table 5, we provide the numbers and percentages of test and authentic questions during each of these activities.

Table 5

Numbers and Percentages of Teacher Questions in Each Major Classroom Activity

Type of Activity	Authentic Questions		Test Questions		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Background Information	188	43%	135	31%	433
Character Analysis	158	27%	265	45%	581
Literary Movements	40	34%	46	39%	119
Post-review Activities	72	39%	55	29%	187
Theme Analysis	123	31%	142	36%	395

The instructor frequently asked, "What else?" This question was coded differently in different contexts. There were 100 instances of the question during nine weeks of recordings. In other words, more than 6% of all teacher questions consisted of this question. Our interpretation of the *what else* questions was similar to that of McGrew (2005) who argued that these questions were used to elicit more information or more in-depth responses from students. In determining the type of *what else*? questions, the context and the preceding question were considered. In Excerpts 3 (see Table 6) and 4 (see Table 7), we illustrate how contextual clues helped us classify these questions.

Table 6

Excerpt 3: "What Else?" as a Test Question

The main question in the previous episode

	T	Here Tom (+) let's come to Tom (+++) Tom has a lot of problems. What are they? Let's discuss (+++) and Tom's main problem is manliness so I want you to give me some examples. Which err (+) which code does Tom violate? (+) so that he is isolated.

"What else?" questions in the following episode

01	T	So Tom and Tom's problems (+) **what else?** (+) About Tom's problems (++) ok (+) Tom's problems? (++)
02	S1	A lot of problems.
03	T	Yes, he has a lot of problems.
04	S1	He has no friends.
05	T	He has no friends, good! **What else?**
06	S2	He has a friend but he is (++)

    The *what else* questions in Excerpt 3 were taken from the second hour of Week Six, but they were closely related to the last episode of the first hour in the same week. In the previous episode, the main topic was the problems of the main character in the play. These problems were also listed in the book. To answer this question, all the students needed to do was to identify the answer and say it. This question, by its nature, did not have any room for further interpretation or students' original contributions; therefore, we coded it as a test question. Similarly, the *what else* questions in the following episode were all coded as test questions.

Table 7

Excerpt 4: "What Else?" as an Authentic Question

04	T	It doesn't change so we would condemn boys like Tom (++) we would condemn, what would happen if we change the (++) let's change the setting (+) the setting isn't American one, but Turkish culture.
05	S1	Maybe it's[
06	T	]the same
07	S1	It is more, it is stronger.

Table 7 (continued).

Excerpt 4: "What Else?" as an Authentic Question

18	T	Yes, good! **<u>What else</u>?**
19	S1	Or he would be taken advantage of[
20	T	]He would be taken advantage? How?
21	S1	If he were in Turkey.

38	T	The students would not hang out with the teachers (+) you see (+) this is one cultural discrepancy (+) **<u>what else</u>?**
39	S1	I don't know now, but later.
40	T	Think about it. Yes, please
41	S2	I think the father would interfere (++) wouldn't let his son stay in the school but take him away (+) to prevent some (++)
42	T	Very good! Herb always pushes him. But Herb has a reason to push him.

In Excerpt 4, *what else* questions were related to the leading question that inquired about the possible effects of a setting change in the play. The instructor's first question, which was a broad authentic question, asked the students to think about a hypothetical setting change in the play. This authentic question opened the floor to the students' ideas because it did not have a fixed answer. One of the students gave an answer to the question, and the instructor directed the same question to other students by using the *what else* structure to extend the discussion. This structure helped the instructor get more in-depth responses from the students. The other students took turns, and the episode from which Except 4 is taken lasted 66 turns. Both *what else* questions in this excerpt were coded as authentic questions because of the initial main question.

Student Questions

Questioning is an integral part of teaching and the default inquirers in many classroom settings are teachers. We would not be mistaken, as Tharp and Gallimore (1988) argued, if we defined a school as "a place where teachers ask questions" (p. 58) and the main role of students in the questioning process is to answer teacher questions. Therefore, a change of roles in the questioning sequence implies important changes of the social dynamics in the classroom. Students assume power and control while asking questions about what they read. According to Nystrand et al. (2003), student questions (a) signal student engagement, (b) affect teacher's control of the classroom discourse positively, and (c) are one of the most important dialogic bids (i.e., teachers' acts that transform monologic classroom discourse into dialogic).

We analyzed the occurrences and types of student questions during teacher-fronted whole group text-based discussions. Table 8 demonstrates how many questions students asked each week of the semester during our observations.

Table 8

Weekly Distribution of Student Questions

Weeks	Number of Student Questions
1	3
2	9
3	5
4	7
5	7
6	5
7	2
8	5
9	11
Total	54

Table 8 was constructed to see if there was a pattern of student questions that evolved over the course of the weeks. However, our analysis revealed that there was no specific pattern of student questions. The number of questions asked by students was very low (around 3%) compared to questions asked by the instructor. However, we were not interested in the quantity, but rather the categories and specific features of student questions. We interpreted some student questions as important signs of engagement and contribution to classroom discourse. After we identified the occurrences of student questions, we examined the types of questions. Our categorization of student questions was based on the data we collected and previous literature (Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Brock, 1986; Cintorino, 1994; McGrew, 2005; Nystrand et al., 2003).

Table 9

Types of Student Questions

Type of Question	Frequency
Procedural	17
Hypothesis-testing	15
Referential	13
Challenge	5
Lexical	4
Total	54

Based on our analysis, among the five categories, only referential and hypothesis-testing questions signaled student engagement because students were inquiring about the texts they read and trying to advance their understanding by employing questions. However, other questions demonstrated some important implications about the academic and social texture (i.e., power relations, turn-taking, distributions of roles, etc.) of the classroom discourse. We will examine each of these categories and provide examples.

Procedural Questions

Sometimes, the students used questions for the management of classroom routines. We called this type of question *procedural* following Boyd and Rubin (2002). In some cases, these were requests to take a turn (e.g., *May I read*?), and in other cases, to inquire about specific information related to the mechanics of the classroom (e.g., *Which page is it*?).

Hypothesis Testing Questions

The students in the literature class we observed sometimes used questions to test their hypotheses about new information that seemed unclear or contradictory. This type of question could be seen as an attempt to reconcile new information with students' existing ideas and experiences. It was also used when students were struggling to match what they knew with the information that emerged during the discussions (e.g., see Cintorino, 1994). Hypothesis testing is an important sign of student engagement as it illustrates the cognitive process of understanding a text. In Excerpt 5, after the teacher's comment in Turn 22, one of the students advanced an idea about the text in the form of

a question. With his question, he attempted to synthesize new information with his previous ideas or information.

Table 10

Excerpt 5: An Example of a Hypothesis Testing Question

21	S1	Salvation
22	T	Yes, wonderful! The emblem of salvation (+) so Christ saved the other people and he is going to save people like Dorothy.
23	S2	**Can we say err (+) there is something related to folk tales?**
24	T	Wonderful! Yes. Because in the folk tales, a hero, it is always a prince charming who saves the young girls. That's why I don't like the fairy tales. Women in life, in reality who saves who? Yes, don't say man! Students laugh]
25	S3	Woman saves man.
26	T	Prove it, prove your thesis.

Referential Questions

Referring to Long and Sato (1983), Brock (1986) defined referential questions as ones that "request information that are not known by the asker" (p. 48). However, almost all student questions, by their nature, may belong to this category as they are usually asking for new information. For this study, referential questions referred to those that focused on unclear issues in the target readings. In this sense they were authentic questions (Nystrand et al., 2003), asking for clarification and understanding of the readings. By asking these questions, students voluntarily joined the meaningful discussion of the readings. They also revealed students' efforts to understand the issues in the texts. For example, in Excerpt 6 (see Table 11), one of the students (S1) explained her intent before asking her question: "I want to ask to know clearly." Then she asked a question about a character wearing a white dress, and wondered if it was symbolic of something she was unaware of. Instead of answering the question directly, the instructor re-uttered the question, and it became a question open to all students.

Table 11

Excerpt 6: An Example of Referential Questions

138	T	It is a tragicomedy [teacher refers to the play, Hairy Ape] (++) err (+) this is what Eugene O'Neil says. Because it is an allusion to Shakespeare (+) life is a tragedy for those who live but it is a comedy for those who watch. So he presents it as a kind of comedy for those who watch but it is a tragedy of (++) a modern tragedy of Yank. Yes please.
139	S1	**I want to ask to know clearly. What is the aim of (++) Mildred wearing white dress?**
140	T	Ok! Why is Mildred wearing?[
141	S2	]to show his class
142	S3	Class consciousness
143	S1	I thought that
144	T	Because you know (+) white (+) white is not a suitable color for the stoke hole [?]. Because, because of the coal dust (++) and coal dust is black (++) black is associated with the workers, and white (+) the opposite. It is to show the class distinction. You see, the gap is so big here (++) white and black.

Lexical Questions

In other cases, students asked questions to inquire about a specific word or information that they did not know in the target language. We labeled this type of question as lexical, following McGrew (2005). During the interviews some of the students mentioned that they were too shy to speak out if there was a word they were not familiar with. However, other students dared to ask for information that they did not know. In Excerpt 7, one of the students was not sure what segregation meant, and asked the instructor. Instead of offering a definition, the instructor provided information about the cultural context of the word. From the student's next comment, we understand that she had some information about the meaning of the word, but did not fully grasp it.

Table 12

Excerpt 7: An Example of Lexical Question

27	T	So segregation means? (+++) separation (+) so (+) but now White and Black people can marry (+) it is just err (++) it is just before (++) before 1960s.
28	S1	**Segregation is?**
29	T	Segregation is some kind of official law.
30	S1	Not only for marriages between them.

Challenge Questions

Sometimes the students did not agree with the teacher's comments, and they challenged the teacher openly by asking questions. In one of these instances, Excerpt 8, (see Table 13) one of the students challenged the instructor's authority with a question. In this episode, the student and the instructor were debating about the possible meanings attached to the bird in the play. At the beginning of the excerpt, the instructor stated that she could not accept the student's suggestion about the bird symbol, and the student questioned the instructor's comment, and also possibly her attitude, by asking, "You say it can't mean two things?" However, the instructor did not change her mind and insisted that she could not accept the student's interpretation. Challenge questions had social implications, as they mainly questioned the teacher's authority in the classroom.

Table 13

Excerpt 8: An Example of Challenge Question

31	T	I can't accept yours (+) I am sorry (++) I can't accept yours.
32	S1	**You say it can't mean two things?**
33	T	It can't be a child, this is certain (+) I can't accept this (+++) If the animal weren't a canary but a cat (+) ok (+) I would (+) maybe (+) But, not in these circumstances. Because, the similarities are so apparent (+) your assumption is false (+++) ungrounded.

Discussion and Implications

Motivated from an SCT perspective, the findings of this study can be interpreted in the following ways. Academically, the abundance of teacher questions might be understood as cognitive tools to scaffold learners in the discussions (McCormick, 1997;

McCormick & Donato, 2000). Socially, however, they imply tight teacher control on classroom discourse (Nystrand, 1997). In the same vein, the type of teacher question used can also be interpreted in different ways. By employing test questions, many teachers proficiently set up discussions by first reviewing basic materials as a way of establishing the topic for discussion. After building background information on the topic, authentic questions enable them to move on to a more interpretive level in which student ideas and contributions are prioritized (Gutierrez, 1994; Nystrand et al., 2003). From a social perspective, test questions give the primary classroom control to teachers, and by simply answering the test questions, students' original ideas are usually ignored. Alternatively, the great quantity of authentic questions identified in the study is an indicator of attention given to student voices and comments, and viewing learners as thinking devices (Lotman, 1988) who are capable of generating novel thoughts from the plays that they read.

Similar to many previous studies both in first language (Nystrand et al., 2003; Pearson & West, 1991) and second language learning settings (Markee, 1995; Ohta & Nakaone, 2004; Skilton & Meyer, 1993; White & Lightbown, 1984), the number of student questions in this study was few compared to the number of teacher questions. In this study, we focused on the qualitative aspects of the questioning practices, however, we did not neglect the quantitative features. We enumerated each construct (e.g., teacher and student questions) because we believed that the quantification of the findings might help us better present our findings. Enumeration also facilitated the establishment of reliability of our coding procedures.

Pedagogically, student questions demonstrate student engagement. They reveal that students are taking active roles in the establishment of classroom discourse and co-construction of knowledge. Moreover, when students begin to ask questions about the texts they are studying, the nature of the discourse takes a more symmetrical shape, which includes equal distribution of conversation rights (Brazil, 1985) compared to the usual classroom instruction dominated by teacher questions. Therefore, a subtle shift in teacher and student questions during classroom discussions may reveal significant changes in the nature of classroom discourse, both academically and socially.

In this study, we examined the nature of teacher and student questions in a foreign literature class in a Turkish EFL setting. We utilized purposeful sampling and worked in a single setting (case) that we had chosen for the reasons discussed previously. Even though we believe that the setting in which we conducted the research was a typical educational setting in the Turkish context, we do not claim the results are comprehensive and transferable to other settings. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, it is the reader's responsibility to decide whether the findings hold for similar settings or not. Based on our previous learning and teaching experiences, we believe that the use

of literature is quite common in language teaching contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, and many instructors use discussions in literature classes even though this situation is not well documented.

The teacher and students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds might have had an impact in the questioning practices in this study. As frequently reported, the Turkish education system is wavering between modern and traditional practices (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Bosnak, 1995; Tatar, 2003). Similarly, in this study, based on the teacher and student interviews, we inferred that the teacher and students frequently assumed their traditional roles in the classroom. The analyses of the discourse were mostly parallel with the findings of the interviews as the teacher dominated most of the discussions that involved questions and held tight classroom control on many occasions by asking too many questions. However, as we described in our study, the students also carried out active roles and were active participants in the classroom discourse from time to time.

An implication that can be drawn from this study, similar to the suggestion of Nystrand et al. (2003), is that teachers are responsible for and should assume an important role in creating a dialogical atmosphere in the classroom. Creating such an atmosphere requires the use of dialogic bids (e.g., student questions, authentic teacher questions). To create dialogic bids, teachers can ask more authentic questions which inquire about the target readings, instead of employing test questions that do not require students' creative participation. In the case of student questions, teachers can either create an instructional atmosphere where students can ask questions freely or let students participate in the flow of the classroom discourse and ask questions. In turn, this will help students initiate more topics and make the classroom discourse more symmetrical.

Finally, as Nystrand et al. (2003) pointed out, we believe that understanding how classroom discourse unfolds can assist teachers in gaining control over "how they interact with students and how they can create instructional settings that both engage students and foster learning" (p. 192). The questioning process, as we have tried to show, is an important aspect of classroom discourse that can directly affect the learning atmosphere in the classroom.

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About the Authors

Dr. Dogan Yuksel is a Lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages Education at Kocaeli University, Turkey. He received his PhD in Mutilingual and Multicultural Education at Florida State University. His research interests include use of literature in language teaching, literary discussion, and teacher and student questions. His e-mail is doganyuksel@gmail.com.

Miao Yu is currently a PhD candidate in Multilingual and Multicultural Education at Florida State University. Her research interest is individual differences in second language acquisition. Her dissertation study is on students' willingness to communicate. Her e-mail is yumiao22@hotmail.com.