



## **An Investigation of Talk as Interaction at Lower-secondary Schools in Slovakia**

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The paper takes an initial look at communicative language competence in general and then goes on to discuss the interactional component of communicative competence. The paper deals with the function of speaking, known as talk as interaction. It is a human interaction with the purpose to maintain social relationships. Further on, teaching approaches and techniques needed for the meaningful development of the function of speaking talk as interaction are outlined. Interactional speaking and its implementation in live class teaching is the focus of the research conducted at the lower secondary school level in Slovakia. The current study applies qualitative approach for collecting non-numerical data and combines content analyses of two textbooks as well as observations carried out at two lower-secondary schools in Slovakia. Our findings indicate that the analysed textbooks provided number of interaction activities and techniques such as drills, dialogues, role-plays, small talk and chatting activities. Observations confirmed that the teachers tried to promote talk as interaction mainly by reading aloud, dialogues and small talk activities. Several potential situations that could lead to the development of the function talk as interaction were detected. All of them were related to small talk activities on different topics. Based on the research results, we advise including all learners into pair work and small talk activities as well as giving them opportunities for sharing their experiences with their peers.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, talk as interaction, qualitative research, content analysis of textbooks, observation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communicative language competence is considered to be the primary goal of teaching English as a foreign language. Its concept and its components are addressed in the reference document Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2011).

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Gondová (2013) described communicative competence as an ability to conduct communication based on language and cultural knowledge in accordance with objectives as well as the communication situation within a specific area of language activity. Broughton (2003) agreed that for the foreign language learner, it might sometimes be more important to achieve communicative competence than to achieve formal linguistic correctness. Brown (2001) claimed that communicative competence was achieved provided there was attention given to language usage. According to Richards (2006, p. 5), communicative competence includes these aspects of language knowledge:

- knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants,
- knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts,
- knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge.

Pauliková (2020a) summarized that communicatively competent users of language knew lexis, phonology, morphology and syntax and had an ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts. They can use functional language in discourse and are able to deal with different situations in communicative environments. Lastly, they are able to take turns and produce unified texts.

To elaborate on how communicative language competence is explored from the perspectives of the current study, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) notion of communicative competence will be considered. They understand it as consisting of several components: discourse competence, sociocultural competence, linguistic competence, formulaic competence, strategic competence and interactional competence. Interactional competence developed by talk as interaction, which is the focus of this paper, is understood as a blend of actional competence and conversational competence. Actional competence is represented through knowledge of language functions in terms of interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems, future scenarios as well as the knowledge of speech act sets. Conversational competence is characterised through the ability to interact by opening/ending conversations, starting/changing topics, interrupting, collaborating (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

### **Review of Literature**

#### **The Interactional Component of Communicative Language Competence**

Brown and Yule (1983) and Richards (2008) investigated the functions of speaking and the reasons why people communicated. Brown and Yule (1983) distinguished two types of human communication which were talk as interaction and talk as transaction. Richards (2008) pointed out these functions required different teaching approaches as they are distinct in their form.

Brown and Yule (1983) stated that people used the spoken word as a tool for “chatting” about different everyday topics. In other words, they performed conversation which

referred to talk as interaction (Richards, 2008). Luoma (2004) indicated that the point of talk as interaction was finding a fluid stream of topics which fit both participants' interests. She argued that topics did not have to be discussed deeply as the purpose of chatting was creating a positive atmosphere.

Bukart (1998) considered interactional talk as people-oriented and very often accompanied with misunderstandings between conversational partners. Fortunately, it is not considered to be a mistake as the partners are not competing and challenging one another (ibid). Also Bygate (1987) claimed that in spoken interaction it was not necessary to be a perfectly accurate producer of language, even though it was useful, but the most important thing was to make sure that communicative partners understood each other. Ur (1996) said the goal of interacting participants was to keep the conversation comfortable and harmonic. For that reason, Ur (1996) proclaimed that practising interactional talk was a way to practice courtesy in language referring to greetings, apologies, thanks etc.

Brown and Yule (1983) summarized the typical features of talk as interaction as having primarily social function where roles, relationship, degrees of politeness and speakers' identity are reflected; furthermore, it includes many generic words. As it is a type of natural conversation, there are features involved such as laughing and provoking to speak more; furthermore, constant feedback from listeners is given (Richards, 2008).

While interacting, speakers need to do more than just talk. First of all, they choose the topic that represents the content of their conversation. They must know how to open and close the conversation and when to let the other person speak and listen. They must also be aware of their partner's personal experiences and how to react appropriately. Lastly, they must always choose the most suitable speaking style (Richards, 2008). Luoma (2004) suggested focusing on basic conversational phrases while learning a foreign language and Bukart (1998) provided some useful phrases that might work as responses which help learners have a successful conversation. Bukart (1998) distinguished the following situations:

- agreeing to cooperate or not: yes, of course; okay; sorry, I can't
- agreeing with what was said: absolutely; yes, that's right; yes, I do
- politely disagreeing: well, not really; perhaps not quite as bad as that
- possible doubt: really? Are you sure?
- expressing an opinion: really nice; very nice, indeed; not very nice; very bad

According to Richards (2008) developing talk in interaction is not always the priority of learners and many of them feel uncomfortable when they come to situations in which they are not able to react. Bukart (1998) also understood interactional talk as being rather demanding for beginners as they were not yet equipped with conversational skills.

The focus of the paper is on learners of A2 proficiency level; therefore, it is necessary to follow the CEFR (2011) and its description of learners' ability to interact at this level. According to CEFR (2011) learners can use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address; greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time; make

and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet; make and accept offers.

### **Teaching Talk as Interaction**

In order to practise talk as interaction in TEFL classroom, Hatch (1978) provided several ideas on how to develop talk as interaction. He suggested learners must be exposed to topics they were able to talk about, and he considered listening to native speakers' conversation to be important as the learners might catch some useful conversational phrases and lastly they should practice predicting questions for a large number of topics" (ibid).

Richards (2008) believed it was important to provide many examples of naturalistic dialogues where the above-mentioned skills and features are provided. Moreover, with lower proficiency levels it is always better to start small conversations about topics with which learners are familiar, e.g., the weather, traffic, school, etc. Later, after an example is clear to them, learners might contribute with their own comments and responses and thus create and practice their own small conversations (ibid). The interactional function of language use requires implementing practice and production of a language in pair and group work (Brown & Yule, 1983). Thornbury (2005) suggested various pairing and grouping techniques for emphasising natural interaction among learners. Information-gap activities, jigsaws, surveys and various games also develop learners' ability to interact in situations that are similar to those in real life. Celce-Murcia (2008) recommended using a variety of activities that are required to be learner centred and interactive: simulating phone calls and writing emails in the target language, making interviews, summarising the gist of a discourse with a partner, role-playing speech act sets, or writing (advertisements, class newsletters, etc.).

Richards (2008) suggested more techniques referring to the interactional function of speaking such as conversations, dialogues, giving compliments, greetings, having casual chats, role-plays, simulations, small talk, and telling jokes. Considering the interactional activities, Gondová (2013) found out that activities in which interaction is practised referred to the notion of direct activities. She agreed with the classification of the above-mentioned activities and at the same time she added that these activities had an interactional character when unplanned and spontaneous. It is necessary to differ whether talk focuses on people and their social relationships, or the purpose is to get business done.

To respond to the experts' theory mentioned above, a brief review of the studies that practically engaged with the topic talk as interaction is provided. The development of communicative language competence at all levels of education including the interactional component is still quite an unexplored phenomenon. Only few research studies aimed at examining the development of interactional competence in foreign language teaching and learning were conducted. The outcomes are summarized in publications by Weda et al. (2021), Jalleh et al. (2021) and Pauliková (2020a, 2021).

Weda et al. (2021) confirmed that English language teachers should provide students with interactive activities in their classrooms and in turn, students would feel secured

and motivated to participate in these activities. Jalleh et al. (2021) found out that teachers of oral communication courses could encourage students to participate in oral communication tasks, such as charades for concrete vocabulary items, student-produced role plays, problem-solving discussions, as well as communicative language-based tasks. These may provide opportunities for TEFL students to develop and practice interactional speaking skills for different contexts. However, the research in the analysed studies was conducted only with university students. No international study could be found that examined fostering talk as interaction also among the learners at primary or lower secondary level.

There is only one known study, conducted in Slovakia, which looked at communicative language competence and included the interactional component. This research was conducted at a primary level of education by Pauliková (2020a, 2021). According to her the interactional competence in real English classrooms was developed only partially. This finding corresponds with Bukart's (1998) research outcome. He considered interactional talk quite demanding for beginners and young learners who are not yet equipped with conversational skills. Motivated by conclusions from these studies, we carried out research at the lower secondary level.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Aims and Research Questions**

In order to find out how the speaking function talk as interaction is taught, the following research aims and research questions were formulated:

- to find out what types of activities promote talk as interaction in the analysed textbooks and workbook
- to find out whether teachers focus on the development of talk as interaction and how they promote this function
- to detect potential situations in observed English lessons for developing talk as interaction

1. Which activities found in the analysed textbooks and workbook promote Talk as Interaction?
2. Do the teachers implement activities focusing on talk as interaction? If yes, how do they implement them? If no, why do they not implement them?
3. Are there any potential situations in English lessons for developing talk as interaction?

To approach the topic in-depth, qualitative research was chosen for the study. To gain a more holistic perspective on teaching the function of speaking, talk as interaction, the research methodology consisted of a combination of two methods. The first method comprised the content analysis of two textbooks and a workbook used in the 9th grade to find out how many activities in the books actually focused on this function of speaking. The second approach involved non-participant observation to help answer the question regarding the development of talk as interaction in real English classroom conditions.

### **Participants and Research Material**

The participants of the research were two qualified teachers of English, with teaching experience of fifteen and thirty years. Before conducting the actual research, both the teachers of English and the head masters approved the conditions of the study. The research was conducted at lower secondary level in Slovakia in January and February 2020.

Research material in the study is represented by the analysed textbooks. The content analysis of two English textbooks and a workbook was conducted. The textbook Project 5, 3rd edition written by Tom Hutchinson (2010), consists of 6 units. Each unit consists of four different sections A, B, C, D, and each section includes exercises aimed at practicing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and communicative skills. The units include also pages focusing on culture, English across the curriculum, revision, project, and a song. The textbook and a workbook More! 3 written by Herbert Puchta and Jeff Stranks (2008) consist of 12 units subdivided into the following sections: introduction, dialogue work or text work (alternated in every second unit), vocabulary and grammar that covers two pages in every single unit, communicative skills reading, listening and speaking. Finally, sections on culture, content language integrated learning (CLIL) and check your progress can be found after every second unit.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In order to guarantee triangulation of the data and methods, two different data collection approaches were applied. The first one is content analysis, which was conducted on two textbooks and one workbook since teacher A did not use a workbook during the English lessons. All speaking activities were analysed with a focus on the function of speaking talk as interaction. Those activities which were associated with developing talk as interaction were identified, classified, and counted. Activities found in the textbooks and workbook were summarised in subsequent tables and qualitative analysis providing reasons for the activities division followed. Furthermore, other codes - form of work and examples were described.

A non-participant semi-structured observation best fits the purposes of our research and its aim is to have some prearranged categories which the researcher looks for, but gathers data in a less systematic manner (Cohen, 2007). This type of observation allowed the researcher to make more careful and objective analysis. The observation was conducted after the content analysis of activities had been completed in order to find out the reality of teaching speaking in English lessons with a focus on talk as interaction. The main aim was to observe whether the teachers utilised activities in textbooks and workbook or whether they used their own activities promoting talk as interaction. Furthermore, it was observed whether English lessons provided situations for the potential development of talk as interaction. Teachers were not asked to implement extra speaking activities as we wanted to capture the real lessons. Data collection was carried out through filling in an observation sheet, consisting of basic information such as date, name of school and class. The second part of the observation sheet focused on activities promoting the function of speaking talk as interaction.

Information included the type of activity, speaking as a main or extra activity, form of work, materials, examples, performance of learners, reactions of learners and potential situations for developing talk as interaction. These items in observations' notes served as categories and codes and were processed for further analyses.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 provides the results of the content analysis of textbook Project 5, textbook and workbook More! 3. Information in the table is complemented by in-depth explanations and comments in the text below. As Table 1 reveals, talk as interaction is developed 14 times in the textbook Project 5, 29 times in the textbook More! 3 and 19 times in the workbook More! 3. Although the textbook More! 3 provides a higher number of interactional activities, it must be emphasized that it includes only one activity type - a dialogue. On the other hand, Project 5 provides less interactional activities, yet it includes four different activity types which are 8 dialogues, 1 role-play, 4 small talk activities and 1 chatting activity.

Table 1  
Content analysis talk as interaction

	Textbook Project 5	Textbook More! 3	Workbook More! 3
Type of activity			
Dialogue	8	29	19
		drill (12)	listening and reading aloud (7)
		drill + real dialogue practice (12)	real dialogue practice (8)
		dialogue read aloud (5)	filling in the gaps to complete the dialogues (4)
Role-play	1	-	-
Small talk	4	-	-
Chatting	1	-	-
Total	14	29	19

### Talk as Interaction Project 5

The table shows that Project 5 provides 14 activities of 4 different types with the purpose to develop talk as interaction. Although the textbook is full of dialogues, close attention was paid to distinguishing which dialogues focus directly on talk interested in people rather than message or drilling the grammar. We found 8 dialogues corresponding to our research interest. It must be mentioned that 3 dialogues out of 8 were found in the unit called Introduction. These dialogues are introduced in the section Everyday English in which learners are asked to ask for clarification. The first two dialogues focus on pair work, where learner A firstly performs the dialogue using the prescribed questions such as: "How was your journey? Is this your first visit to England? Did you have a good journey? How long will you stay here?". Learner B then answers. After practising the dialogue, learners are asked to perform their own dialogues. Another dialogue, found only three pages later in the Speaking section, asks learners to work in pairs. The purpose of this dialogue is to express likes and dislikes within various themes

such as shopping, sports, food, etc. For example: “Do you like shopping? Yes, I do. / No, I don’t. Why don’t you like shopping? How often do you go shopping? What are your favourite...?” Many pages later, a dialogue was found, in which learners were asked to express their opinion in different situations. They must work in pairs and develop short dialogues asking different questions. For example, someone tried to steal your mobile phone. You found a wallet with some money in it. You saw people bullying your friend. Later on, in the speaking section, we found a task asking learners to work in pairs again and develop dialogues for giving advice. It was interesting to find out that learners have prescribed forms of how turn taking should look like. For example: “A: Give a warning. B: Ask why? Why not? Give a reason. B: Respond”. The topics for these dialogues came from the picture, in which people are exposed to some danger. The dialogue then might look subsequently, “A: I’d put a T-shirt on if I were you. B: Why? It’s hot today. A: Yes, but you might get sunburnt. B: Maybe you’re right”. Another dialogue, which is based on the same principle as the one described before was found in the Revision section. Learners are asked to practise the dialogues in pairs within different suggested situations, e.g. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to have our picnic here. We shouldn’t play Frisbee here”. The very last dialogue was found in the Vocabulary section that focused on phrasal verbs. Learners were first asked to read the casual dialogue between friends talking about other friends then split up and perform it in their own way. Interactional phrases such as “Oh, I see! Oh dear”, etc. were presented. This dialogue can be considered a prototype of talk as interaction as it depicted real life conversation between friends.

Another activity type corresponding to talk as interaction was a role-play which occurred only once. Surprisingly, the role-play activity was found in the Grammar section. Learners are asked to work in groups and finish a dialogue as a resolution for the love story between two friends arguing about working conditions for children. After creating the dialogue, the pairs should perform it. As the purpose of this task was to perform as natural a role-play as possible, there are no suggested examples. Both learners were introduced to the roles of the people in the reading exercise so they could create dialogue based on their own personalities and opinions.

The third group of activities, suggested by Richards (2008) to develop interactional speaking is small talk. In total, we found only 4 small talk activities, which should be initiated by teachers according to Project 5 Teacher’s book (2009). Their purpose was to lead into the reading or listening exercises, to revise the grammar or talk about jobs. The first small talk activity tries to find the learners’ attitudes towards sports and other hobby type activities, e.g. “What sports do you play or watch? Do you enjoy them? What other things do you do in your free time?”. The second small talk activity, found in the Revision section, precisely Grammar, focused on small talk between the teacher and learner about their ideal day: e.g. “How would you spend an ideal day? What would you do? What wouldn’t you do?”. Another small talk activity, the purpose of which was to talk about jobs, was found in the Vocabulary section. The penultimate small talk activity includes questions like the following ones: “What jobs would you like to do when you leave the school? Why? What do you like about this job?”. The last small talk activity was found only two pages later, its purpose and the topic was the same; however, the



questions were asked in a negative way: e.g. “What job couldn’t you do? Which one wouldn’t you choose? Why?”.

The last group of talk as interaction activities is represented by chatting. As the table shows, there was only 1 chatting task and this was done on a mobile phone. The reason this activity was not placed among the dialogue activities is that there was no direct two-way communication included, as there was no partner on the other side of the phone. In this case, the learner had to pretend to be talking to someone i.e. carry out a mock phone dialogue and chat about a party.

### **Talk as Interaction (More! 3)**

Analysis in the textbook *More! 3* revealed that there was only one activity type promoting talk as interaction - a dialogue. Although the textbook consists of 12 units and each unit offers a Dialogue work or Communication section, not all dialogues could be considered as interactional ones. There were 29 dialogues found in total with 3 different techniques for practising or performing the dialogues.

The first technique was drill applied in 12 out of 27 activities. These dialogues drills were found in the sections mentioned above and were introduced as Listen and repeat. The purpose of these tasks was to prepare learners for using particular grammar or interactional patterns.

*For example: Have you ever been to England? B: No, I haven't. Have you? A: Yes, I have; or other examples A: Let's go camping this year! B: Camping? No, I'd rather go hiking; A: I like your mobile phone. B: My phone? Oh, thank you; A: Let's go canoeing! B: No, that's too difficult. I'd prefer to go trekking; etc.*

There were many such drills preceding the real dialogue practise in pairs which represent another technique applied in dialogues. 12 interactional dialogues were found in the Dialogue work or Communication sections. Learners were usually asked to create new dialogues based on the drill they practised before. Some pictures in the exercise depicted situations connected to the topics of the units. Interestingly, the pictures really described the casual situations for natural conversations which are the basis for talk as interaction, for example: “friend chatting about mobile phones; films; free time activities; star signs or superstitions but also expressing sympathy towards friends who were in difficult situations”. Moreover, through these dialogues learners practised several functions such as asking about where people have been, talking about suggestions/preferences, expressing likes/dislikes, saying what you are going to do, talking about superstitions, giving advice, etc.

The last technique applied in dialogue practise was reading the dialogues aloud. These dialogues were part of the Units' introductions and were found 5 times. According to the Teachers' book, the learners are firstly asked to read the dialogue and then perform it. These dialogues represented real life conversations among friends chatting in different situations with phrases such as “You are really late! Oh, no; You'll never guess! Oh, come on! Tell me!; Sure. Go ahead!; Hi there! Lucky you!; We are so lucky! You're right!”. It must be mentioned that all dialogues mainly practised new grammar that the particular units focus on.

**Talk as Interaction (Workbook - More! 3)**

Analysis conducted on the workbook More! 3 revealed that it provides only one type of interactional activity referring to a dialogue and there were 19 occurrences of this. Although most of the dialogues are accompanied by writing or reading, their content corresponds to our first category which learners are exposed to.

From the viewpoint of teaching techniques, dialogues provided by the workbook can be distinguished into three types. The first one was listening and reading aloud at the beginning of some units but also within the Dialogue work or Communication sections. 7 activities of this type were found. Learners are exposed to the interactional phrases corresponding to different topics and situations. The phrases used within casual dialogues are “Hi Jack! Do you have a minute? Yes, sure. Great idea!; Hi Mum! Yes, I know. That’s nice.; Please, help me! I know! Hmm...That’s very interesting but...; Come on. Oh, no!; Are you OK? What’s the matter? I’m sorry.” etc.

Other types of dialogues, found 8 times, were connected mostly to speaking as the dialogues were found under the title Speaking as part of an Exam section or Learning to Learn section. Although some of these dialogues were accompanied by writing as well, the main purpose was to teach learners basic functions such as greetings, asking about plans, refusing, accepting and suggesting. In some cases they only have to perform the dialogues and in other cases they have to construct a dialogue by using provided terms/sentences. The purpose of one of the dialogues was to prepare learners for real life English conversation. The task included instructions on how to handle such conversation and how to start a conversation: for example, “What’s your name? Where do you live? How old are you? Have you got any brother or sister? What do you do in your free time? What did you do yesterday? Have you ever been abroad?” etc. Learners are asked to practise this dialogue in pairs by asking and answering these questions. A similar task focused on asking about the future plans and learners were supposed to practise grammar using the structure “going to”. Another task was connected to talking about films.

The last group of interactional dialogues was found 4 times in the middle of several units under the Vocabulary and Communication section. The purpose of these dialogues was for the learner to fill in the gaps in order to complete them or put the dialogues into the correct order. The 4 dialogues contained a range of different language structure elements such as talking about films, talking about what learners would do, expressing sympathy and asking somebody to do something. Within each dialogue, learners practise interactional patterns corresponding to the conversation as it might occur in real life, for example “you are right, not sure about that, yes, maybe”.

**Observations Analyses**

As part of the observation analysis, a total of 15 lessons were observed. In order to interpret the results of the observation, we created an observation sheet whose main category was the function of speaking talk as interaction. However, as the research progressed, we had to add a new category concerning potential situations in which this function of speaking could be developed. Table 2 lists the system of categories and

codes used for the analysis based on work carried out by Reid (2014). Below the table interpretations of the observed lessons are outlined.

Table 2  
Summary of categories and codes from the observation analysis

	Teacher A	Teacher B
Total number of observed lessons:	6	9
1. Presence of Talk as Interaction		
Code:		
1. Yes	2	12
2. No	-	-
3. Activity type	small talk, reading	small talk, reading
4. Materials	textbook	textbook, CD player
5. Speaking as main activity	1	1 (reading aloud) 2 (dialogue)
6. Speaking as an extra activity	1	9 (small talk)
7. Form of work	learner-teacher (small talk) pairs (reading aloud)	learner-teacher (small talk) pairs (dialogue) group of four (reading aloud)
2. Potential situations for developing talk as interaction	7 (small talk)	1 (simulation)

### Observation Teacher A

Talk as interaction was observed twice during the third and fourth observed lessons. It was Monday, the first lesson and the teacher started her lesson with a small talk type of activity. It is alarming that small talk at the beginning of the class was only noted in 1 out of 6 lessons. Since it was Monday, the teacher asked the learners some casual questions about the weekends. Code number four, referring to materials, reveals that the teacher did not use any material as the questions were developed from the interaction between her and learners. Code numbers five and six focus on whether the speaking activity was the main or an extra activity. In this case it can be said that speaking was an extra activity at the beginning of the lesson and the purpose was to find out some information about learners' weekend through a dialogue. Code number seven, form of work during the speaking activity, reveals that interaction was not developed between the learners, but between the teacher and learner. The teacher randomly chose 2 learners from the total number 14. We also provide examples of dialogue, representing talk as interaction, which was literally transcribed during the observation.

T: "What did you do at the weekend?"

V: "I visited my grandparents in Trenčín."

T: "I saw you walk with some friends, where did you go?"

V: "We went to the cinema."

T: "What film was shown?"

*V: "Did you like it?"*

*T: "Yes, very much."*

This small talk dialogue consisted of 4 questions from the teacher followed by an answer from the learners. It might be said that this is a good example of people-oriented casual conversation, the purpose of which is to maintain social interaction. During the teacher-learner small talk, most of the class chatted with their partners and did not pay attention to what was happening in the class. Moreover, they spoke in Slovak and the teacher did not tell them off.

The second talk as interaction was represented by reading aloud, which is not a typical activity for the development of the functions of speaking. However, this one dealt with reading a casual chat between two friends, and so the learners could see how such conversations work. Code number 4 refers to the textbook Project 5, page 32, exercise 2b. Since this dialogue reading was the main part of the lesson, we can apply code number 5. As for the code 7, form of work, learners first listened to the dialogue and afterwards worked in pairs and read the dialogue out loud. The dialogue was performed 3 times by 3 different pairs. We provide some sentences from the dialogue (Project 5, 2009, p. 32)

*L1: "Hey look. There's a new tattoo place here."*

*"Oh, yes. If I had a tattoo, I'd have a little butterfly on my shoulder. What about you?"*

*L2: "A tattoo? My parents would go mad if I did anything like that. Would you have your tongue pierced?"*

*L1: "No, I wouldn't do that. I'd have my eyebrow pierced, but not my tongue. Ugh."*

We managed to detect some situations that could lead to the development of the function talk as interaction. Therefore, we created the category Potential situations for developing functions of speaking. In teacher A's classes we could identify 7 potential situations. All of them suggest small talk to different topics among which five could represent small talk at the beginning of each lesson. We suggest including more learners and spending at least 5 minutes on this activity. The sixth small talk activity which could be used to develop interactional talk was a pre-reading brainstorming on the topic of Education in the USA. There could be a short dialogue between teacher and learner or learner and learner where they find out if their partner has already visited the USA, if he/she knows something about the USA or their educational system, if he/she likes/dislikes the USA and so on. The remaining small talk activity could be on the topic of Risks where learners read the article called "Would you dare...?" Before the reading they were provided with some phrases such as "dyed their hair orange, shaved their head, had an unusual hairstyle or had their tongue pierced." The teacher asked the students if they knew anybody who has done these things or if they would do these themselves. Some learners responded with "Yes" but it was not developed further. Here we suggest eliciting their opinion or experiences and create a kind of casual conversation.

**Observation Teacher B**

Talk as interaction was developed in Teacher B's classes the most. We observed 12 activities focusing on this function in total. Considering code number 3 referring to activity type, we observed 9 small talk activities at the beginning of each lesson, 1 reading aloud of the conversations between 4 friends and 2 interactional dialogues. Concerning code number 4, the small talk activities did not require any material as they were naturally occurring from the teacher's initiative. The small talk activities generally took around 5 minutes and were done at the start of the class, and so we can classify these under code numbers 5 and 6 in Table 2. Form of work, representing code number 7, was usually done in pairs but not between learners. It took place between the teacher and learner. The teacher usually led the conversation with 3 different learners and she asked them what they did the day before. If there was somebody missing, she wanted to know where the learner was: for example, a small talk at the first lesson after the Christmas holiday.

*T: "S, tell us something about your holiday. What did you do?"*

*S: (silence, not willing to speak)*

*T: "Tell us two things that you did."*

*S: "Hmm, watching the series and sleeping."*

*T: "What about skiing? Do you ski?"*

*S: "Ah, yes."*

*T: "Did you go somewhere?"*

*S: "Yes. Martinské Hole."*

*T: "Aha, Ok. Thank you."*

As can be seen, the learner was not willing to speak much, but the teacher tried to elicit as much information as possible. Moreover, it can be seen that both the teacher and the learner used so-called fillers (Ah, Hmm, and Aha).

One of the activity types was also reading aloud the conversation between four friends chatting at the shopping centre. The material used for this activity was the textbook and CD player. Since this dialogue was part of the Speaking section, code number 5 might be applied. When it comes to form of work, code number 7, conversation was read 3 times by 4 different learners representing the characters in the article. We provide an example of the passage proving that learners practised interactional function (More! 3, 2014, p. 84)

*Learner 1: "Hi, there! What are you doing at the shopping centre?"*

*Learner 2: "Holly's looking for something to spend her birthday money on!"*

*Learner 3: "Lucky you! If I were you, I'd buy a laptop."*

*Learner 4: "But we've got a computer in the living room."*

Although the learners did not produce their own sentences, this conversation represents casual chatting between friends in order to maintain a social relationship which is the main aim of talk as interaction. Furthermore, learners could see what a natural conversation might look like. After introducing this conversation, the learners practised their own dialogues.

The remaining 2 activities were dialogues, which were first read aloud and then performed. Code number 4, referring to material reveals that all dialogues were based on using the textbook and CD player. Both dialogues were part of Dialogue work and Communication section and represent the main part of the lesson; therefore, code number 5 might be applied. When it comes to code number 7, learners worked in pairs in both dialogue performances. The teacher asked them to work with a partner, they had 5 minutes for preparation and then each pair presented one of the dialogues. In one dialogue performance the learners practised giving advice using the 2nd conditional. They were given 6 situations for which they had to make dialogues following the pattern, "I need...; If I were you, I'd..." The second dialogue performance was based on expressing opinions using phrases such as "In my opinion; I think; I don't agree; Yes, maybe you're right; I'm not sure about that; etc." In this case, the learners were given 5 sentences and were to express agreement or disagreement. We provide an example of dialogue performed by two learners studying the topic of expressing opinions. This dialogue was literally transcribed by the observer.

*Learner 1: "In my opinion, people should never go to fast-food restaurants."*

*Learner 2: "I don't agree. I think fast-food is fine. I like hamburgers."*

*Learner 1: "Well, I think fast-food is unhealthy."*

*Learner 2: "Yes, maybe you're right."*

Although the dialogues produced by the learners were not long, the teacher did not pay attention to that. On the other hand, she gave all pairs a chance to present their dialogues.

In teacher B's classes only one potential situation for developing the function talk as interaction was identified - a simulation. The learners listened to 4 dialogues between two friends about a problem that happened to them. We suggest asking the learners whether they have experienced something similar. If yes, they could create simulations about the problems of their own. If not, we suggest suggesting some problem situations to discuss. They could follow the pattern: introduce yourself, introduce the problem, wait for a response, ask for advice, agree/disagree with advice, say thank you and goodbye.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the research questions addressed in this study, this section discusses the results. As for the research question "Which activities found in the analysed textbooks and workbook promote Talk as Interaction?", the analysis revealed that the textbook More! 3 provides a high number of interactional activities in form of dialogues. The

textbook Project 5 provides less interactional activities, yet it includes four different activity types which are dialogues, role-plays, small talk and chatting activity.

The research focused on observing two teachers and their different approach in making use of the function of speaking talk as interaction. To answer the research question “*Do the teachers implement activities focusing on the function of speaking talk as interaction? If yes, how do they implement them? If no, why do they not implement them?*”, it can be stated that both teachers developed the interactional function by using small talk activities and dialogues from the textbook. The difference is that teacher A used small talk at the beginning of the first lesson after the weekend and teacher B used small talk at the beginning of each lesson. For category 1, from the 6 observed lessons teacher A implemented 2 interactional activities which were 1 small talk activity at the beginning of one lesson and 1 reading aloud of a conversation between two friends. Small talk was considered to be speaking as an extra activity as opposed to reading aloud which was speaking as the main activity. From the 9 observed lessons teacher B implemented 12 interactional activities; 9 of them were small talk activities at the beginning of each lesson representing speaking as an extra activity. Reading aloud of a casual conversation between friends with 2 dialogue performances, the purpose of which was giving advice or expressing opinions, represent speaking as the main activity.

Considering the research question “*Are there any potential situations in English lessons for developing the function of speaking talk as interaction?*”, the observations revealed 7 potential opportunities which were not used but could have been used to promote talk as interaction through small talk activities in teacher A’s classes. Teacher A could have used small talk activities at the start of the lesson on 5 occasions. Furthermore, on one occasion the teacher could have implemented a pre-reading speaking task to elicit the learner’s experiences. In teacher’s B classes we could identify only one potential situation for developing this function through simulation. Learners read about certain problem situations and the teacher could have created more problem situations for the learners to discuss.

In the following section the findings of our research are summarised and discussed in the light of the information available in the studied literature. To link the outcomes of our research with Pauliková’s findings (2020a, 2021), the following comparison can be stated. According to her the interactional component of the language competence of the pupils at primary level was developed only partially with numbers of occurrence too low to represent the development of the competence appropriately. On the contrary, our observations at the lower secondary level revealed that the function talk as interaction was taught fairly often. The reason is the higher number and the variety of interaction activity types in the analysed textbooks, and the fact that the teachers at the lower secondary level regard interactional speaking as more important to be part of the teaching process. Our findings are supported by the existing literature, for example Council of Europe (2001) suggests developing functional competence by a progressive increase in the complexity of functional range of texts as well as by increasing requirement on the learners to produce functional language. From the results of the textbooks analysis and observations, the required increase of practical tasks and

activities that promote functional language use and also explicit exercising of these functions, is evident.

### **CONCLUSION**

To discuss the impact of the study in TEFL contexts, the constraints of the research that might have influenced its results have to be mentioned. The readiness of the learners to speak was detected as a certain problem. Sometimes they were willing to interact and sometimes they were not. 9th graders going through puberty usually use short sentences and replies. In several cases, the learners also had difficulties finding the correct vocabulary and grammar structures. Another problem observed was the learners' lack of imagination and deficiencies in thinking skills. The learners tried to interact but they often did not know how to do it. The perspectives of the nature of language learners when acquiring a foreign language need to be discussed at this point. Several factors such as level of proficiency, or motivation influence the adolescent learners to behave in a certain way when interacting in foreign language. However, the learners still depend on the teacher's guidance. Therefore, certain insufficiencies in the teachers' approach have to be mentioned as well. They did not include all learners into pair work and small talk activities. Moreover, both missed several opportunities to elicit feedback from the learners who shared their experiences with their peers.

Exploring this function requires monitoring its practice in real class conditions for a longer period of time. In order to improve the development of the function talk as interaction, we formulate the following recommendations, which might be applied in further teaching practice. If possible, teachers should start each lesson with small talk activities about the learners' experiences from the previous day. Furthermore, teachers should react to learners' responses and try to develop natural communication. To address the issue of missing vocabulary, teachers should pre-teach structures needed for successful communication in discourse. Teachers should also consequently insist on using English instead of the native language while learners chat to each other.

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