

AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: ELICITATION TECHNIQUES IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Ms. Shuruq Alsubaie

Language Instructor, ELI, University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT: *This paper is qualitative-quantitative study that concentrates on analyzing and investigating 'elicitation techniques' which is believed to be one of the most important features of EFL classroom discourse. It mainly examines the ways in which teachers practice elicitation questioning using data from three different English language classes recorded in ELI at King Abdulaziz University. Conversational analysis was adapted to analyze the selected transcribed extracts and counting was used to calculate the extent to which they are used. The findings indicated that teachers in ELI used three types of question to elicit information from their students: Yes/no question, closed/display questions and open-referential questions. It also revealed that yes/no and closed/display questions were used by teachers more frequently than referential questions. It was concluded that not all referential questions could create enough interaction.*

KEYWORDS: Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Elicitation Techniques, Display Questions, Referential Questions

INTRODUCTION

One of the remarkably significant factors to create an effective language learning environment is to enable students to do most of the talking in class. Nonetheless, Walsh (2002) points out that in many EFL classrooms the teacher is the one who does the most talking leaving very limited opportunities to students to talk and most of the time they remain silent. An interactional classroom situation is when students are engaged and actively participate in the lesson. Also, students' participation is more genuine if they are productive rather than quite receptive. However, in order for the students to participate actively, they need to be motivated to do so. This motivation can be achieved through many practical techniques and tools to make materials and tasks more interactive and more learner-focused, encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning. One way is to elicit information from students by asking different types of questions. This research is designed to investigate to what extent teachers elicit information, to classify the type of questions used for this purpose and to discuss its role in the learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of "teacher as researcher" that was generated around the 1990s has driven teachers to be interested in analyzing the classroom discourse. Nunan (1991) states that "if we want to enrich our understanding of language learning and teaching, we need to spend time looking in classrooms". Therefore, teacher researchers began to collect data from classrooms and analyze this data in an attempt to find some ideal teaching methods that would participate in developing their teaching practices and the course of learning. Teacher talk can be used as a great source

of input and the questions teachers ask in classrooms are part of that talk. Brock (1986) believes that teachers' talk, like the kind of questions teachers ask, would considerably affect the quantity and quality of student interaction in the lesson.

An important tool used for involving students in a lesson and facilitating student participation is elicitation or the art of thought provoking questions. It is considered as one of the most important features of second language classroom discourse. Walsh (2013) defines Elicitation techniques as 'strategies used by teachers to get learners to respond'. In other words, they are techniques used by teacher during the lesson to get information about what students already know and need to know .It involves learners in the process of understanding and discovering language. In addition, there are many techniques a teacher may use to elicit information. For example, questioning, strategic pausing, student-directed activities, using visuals..etc. Also, anything in the lesson can be elicited: vocabulary, grammar, experiences and ideas.

Walsh (2013) believes that elicitation entails asking questions and that questioning is one of the principal ways in which teacher control the classroom discourse. Many researchers investigate the types of questions selected by teachers and kind of responses to these questions. Teacher questions are categorized into: open and closed questions, display and referential questions and lastly yes/no questions. Tsui(1995) declares that the classification of the question can be decided through the kind of respond it elicits and the nature of interaction it generates. According to Thornbury (1996), most of the questions that asked by teachers in classrooms are display questions. He also defines display questions are questions to which teachers already know the answers. Although this type of questions seems to be preferable by teachers but it doesn't really lead to communicative responses as argued by Kumaravadivelu (1993). Dalton-Puffer (2007, p.69) indicates that "answers to display questions are seen as notoriously restricted, quite often consisting of one word". As a result, it seems that display questions are not aimed to promote discussion but to check comprehension. Another type of questions used to elicit students' knowledge is referential questions that have no specific answer. Ellis (1994), finds that the purpose behind asking this type of question is to allow students to express opinions and exchange information. Dalton-Puffer (2007, p.69) also thinks that" referential questions are frequently seen as more 'natural' and are expected to generate student answers that are somehow qualitatively better, more authentic, more involved, longer and more complex" .Consequently, it appears that using referential questions makes any discourse in the classroom more alive and natural because in real life we do not actually know the answers of questions we're asking therefore such questions are more communicative. The purpose of present study is to investigate the types of questions asked by teachers to elicit information from their students in King Abdulaziz University/ Eli classrooms. It aims to analyze and classify questioning during the lesson and to what extent does it operate students' interaction that is likely to inhabit students' opportunities to use language for communication. And whether it focuses discussion on learners' ideas, opinions, imagination and involvement and successfully facilitates language development.

METHODOLOGY

This study inquires whether using elicitation questions facilitates extended oral participation by EFL students in ELI level four classes at King Abdulaziz University .

Participants

The participant in this study were three experienced ELI teachers who are teaching the same level (one female and two males) in KAU, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. They were coded as: TA, first male teacher, TB second male teacher and TC for the female teacher and the classes were organized accordingly as Class1, Class 2 and Class3. The students are aged 18-19, Arabic L1 speakers, and level 104. In classes 1&2 they were male students while in class 3 they were female students.

The data

The data for the present study were the selected transcripts of one videotaped English lesson and two audio recordings of two English lessons, the three lessons taught by three teachers, class 1 was video recorded and classes 2&3 were audio recorded. Only targeted interactions were transcribed. The lessons of classes 1&2 were reading about food and jobs and the lesson of class 3 was a grammar lesson about past progressive tenses. The total class time of the three lessons was 127 minutes (50 minutes, 60 minutes and 17 minutes) respectively.

Procedure

To collect data, a qualitative data analysis was followed. Three different lessons were recorded. Then transcripts for these recordings were written for selected discourse. The aim is to identify questions in the data and to focus on specific elicitation questions and student responses. A number of features of the selected discourse transcripts were examined from conversation analysis (CA) perspective as means of understanding the types of elicitation questions and their effect on students' level of interaction. Moreover, in order to sort out the elicitation questions asked by the three teachers, questions used in each class were counted quantitatively as well as the average length (number of words) of students' responses to the different types of teachers' elicitations.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Analysis of different types of questions

In this section, the findings of the study are presented, using three selected extracts from the audios and the video. The analysis focuses on the way in which ELI teachers used different types of questions to elicit information from their students.

In extract 1 below, the class has just started the pre-reading discussion. The focus of the stage is to get students introduced to the topic of the reading material. The teacher (TA) is eliciting responses and students are responding.

Extract 1: Food

- 1 TA: (pointing at the displayed picture of a dish on the projector) Ok .What do we call this dish (.) or food ?
- 2 Bara'a
- 3 L1: Kabsa
- 4 TA:Kabsa(1)Do you like it?
- 5 L2: yes , I like it..

- 6 TA: ok what is it made of? What is it made of ? (.) yes?
 7 L3: rice and checking and =
 8 TA:= ↑RICE.ok.Saleh
 9 L4: chicken=
 10 TA: =ok chicken (zaid)
 11 L5: or meat
 12 TA: >or meat< yeah (1) what else?
 13 L6:tomatos
 14 TA: tomatos. Excellent. Yasser
 15 L7: Onion
 16 TA: ONION .right.excellent (2) Is it a famous dish in Saudi Arabia? Is it a famous dish?
 17 Moayad
 18 L8: yes.
 19 TA: ok((outside interruption))(13) Ok Is it famous in Saudi Arabia?(.)just in
 20 Saudi Arabia? What about the Gulf?
 21 L9: In the gulf
 22 TA: Yes in the gulf as well.right? ok .Where do you eat it? Where do you eat
 23 Kabsa? Where do you eat Kabsa? Sultan
 24 L10: everywhere.
 25 TA: £everywhere £?(laughs) Ok ...Sulami
 26 L11: Usually in my house
 27 TA: Usually.ok.in your house. yes...
 28 L11: Sometimes in a restaurant.

The extract opens with TA trying to draw the students attention to the picture displayed in front of them using a non-verbal action which is ' pointing ' at line1.Right after, he used the transition marker 'OK' to get students' attention. This is followed by the first question to elicit the students' first impression about the picture at lines 1-2. It seems that TA knows that his students have a previous knowledge of the answer to the question and he was trying to use it as a lead in to start the pre-reading discussion. To bring students into interaction the teacher used 'individual nomination' at 2, 8, 10, 14, 17, 23, and 25. The first learner response was one word "kabsa" (3) which was repeated by the teacher to emphasize that it's the correct answer. This is followed with a yes/no question to which was the answer a simple

"Yes". The teacher again moved to ask a closed/display question twice at the same time (6). We notice here that L3 started to response with more than one word(7) but TA interrupts him with raising intonation and heavy emphasis on the first word of the learner's answer =↑RICE (8)to stop the fluency of his turn and to engage another students in the interaction. May be the teacher's goal is to give equal chances to students to participate as he focused to only get one word as an answer but this as we can see has broken the flow of the student speech. Then he continues to elicit one word each student (9-15) as an answer to the question that was asked in line (6). At line 16 TA went back to ask yes/no question to again elicit a one word expected answer "yes". This is followed by another yes/no question that was repeated may be for emphasis or for giving a space to student to comprehend what is being said. The repetition of yes/no question at line 19 is followed with a closed/display question that carried the answer of the whole previous questioning (20). L9 answer was a clear repletion (21) of the teacher words at line 20.At line 22, TA repeated his first open question three times but he didn't seem to be satisfied with L10 one word answer as he laughs and turned to nominate another student. L11 started to answer and TA tried not to interrupt but once the learner stopped TA repeated his

answer along with (ok..yes(27)) in an attempt to encourage L11 extend his response. This resulted in L11 longer response at line 28.

Based on the analysis so far, it is clear that this extract is a mix of yes/no questions and closed/display questions respectively. Also, it is notice that the participation of students is greatly influenced by the nature of these questions. If the teacher is trying here to create a pre-reading discussion then a different type of questioning is required. But if the teacher's pedagogical goal is to only check students' background knowledge of the reading being presented then this type of questions is appropriate. Because as seen above, the students' responses to the close/display questions were really short and expected and yes/no questions elicited only yes/no response. Visibly, the yes/no response were expected as well. For example, the answers in lines 3, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 24 were only one word response. At 5, 18 the answers of a simple 'yes' were expected and the answer at line 21 was spoon fed. Now, it is evident that these types of questions fails to create a huge and fruitful discussion as they didn't need any effort to be answered and they didn't really challenge the learner mind to think. Thus, the use of these questions is better to be limited to concept checking. In contrast, the one open/referential question asked by the teacher by the end of extract 1(22-23) elicited the longest answer (26-28) among all the previous attempts. A more detailed look on this type of questions is presented in extract 2, in which TB is eliciting students' dream jobs.

Turning to the next class, the reader should kindly remember that the context is very comparable: the students are the same age, level, gender and have the language ability and educational background as the students in the first class.

In extract 2 below, TB is trying to create a discussion atmosphere before introducing the reading passage and starting any activity. He is trying to elicit some of the students dream jobs and get them to talk about them. The extract below presents the teacher interaction with more than one student.

Extract 2: Dream job

- 1 TB: >alright<, the first question is ° as you know is about ↑dream jobs. What is
- 2 your dream job? If you had a(2) ha a way of getting a job(.) What would it be?=
3 L1: =Pilot
- 4 TB: would be a pilot (asking another student) What would you be(.) Waleed?=
5 L2: =Lair
- 6 TB: LAWYER not a liar.a lawyer...ok.good...and Abdulaziz?
7 L3: a doctor
- 8 TB: >Now< the question I'm gonna ask is ↑Why? >Alright<let's start back with
9 Ameen,<WHY ?> would you like to be a pilot?
- 10 L1: I love travelling
- 11 TB: you love travelling?.ok. good< that's a good response>>Where to ? that's the 12
question. Where to ? Where would you like to travel?
- 13 L1: All over the world=
14 TB: =All over the ↑world. Fantastic .Have you travelled anywhere?
15 L1: Yeah
- 16 TB: Where have you travelled to?
17 L1: Singapore and France.
- 18 TB: Did you enjoy these places?
19 L1: yeah

- 20 TB: so what was(.) the difficulties you found?(1) when you went there (.) to these
 21 places? >were there any< problems?
 22 L1: No...
 23 TB: No problems with FOOD?
 24 L1: Just fun(1) aah (.) food. yeah (.) halal food just...
 25 TB: you had problems finding Halal food ?
 26 L1:yeah...
 27 TB: OK ↑Waleed (1)What would you like to be? If you had <a dream job>that
 28 you could get,you could work as(.) What would you like to to be?
 29 L2: I'd like to be lawyer
 30 TB: you'd like to be a lawyer?...WHY? this is the big question=
 31 L2: =yes,I went to defent poor people.
 32 TB: you want to defend poor people?
 33 L2: yes
 34 TB: just poor people?(.) What about rich people?
 35 L2: People which has a (2) terrible mistake ↓
 36 TB: people who have what ?. sorry ?...
 37 L2: who have a problem...

The extract opens with an elicitation attempt by TB at lines 1-2 that got interrupted by L1's one word response(3).Then , TB used an 'individual nomination' to elicit more responses of the same closed/display question(4). For this question he got three different responses all of only one word (3, 5, 7). This is followed by going back to L1 for more extended response using an open/referential question this time "why?"(8) with a sharp raise in intonation. At line 9 he repeated the same question "WHY" this time with higher volume to indicate that TB was seeking more clarification and reasons. At line 10, L1 provided a little longer response and out of it TB extracted another question (11-12) to elicit more responses from the same student who started to get engaged in the discussion (13). Also, TB motivated L1 to speak more by showing his interest in more interaction using a number of encouraging words (11, 14) so that the student feel more confident to express more responses. At line 14, TB Asked a yes/no question but the answer here wasn't expected. This is followed again by open/referential question to continue with the conversation. Further, TB in line 20 was trying to participate in feeding L1's brain storm process with more thought to be expressed.L1's response 'No' at line 22 didn't seem to be convincing to TB who tried to draw L1's attention to one main problem he may have faced. L1 responses at line 24 came to confirm that he remembers one idea to add and actually it was the longest response presented by L1 in this extract. At line27 TB moved to another student to elicit similar information. He asked L2 the same question again "WHY?" but this time with more emphasis as he stated clearly "this is the big question" which confirms that he was trying to get his students in a longer interaction and get them to speak.L2 response at 31 to the same question with different answers which offers the variety in this interaction. It can be recognized that L2 response for TB open question (30,84) are five words each which suggests a good progress of the interaction.

After analyzing this extract, one can see that TB used more open/referential questions to which the students were able to give extended responses. The total of L1 responses was 20 words and the total of L2 responses was 19 words. It is obvious that the use of such questions is effective in promoting a variety of longer responses. However, not only the use of the open/referential

questions that resulted in such interaction but also students were given time to think. TB spent 58 seconds with L1 and 22 seconds with L2 including turn-taking and question-answers strategies. Moreover, it is noticed that TB elicit one word responses at the beginning of the extract to open the door for the discussion then gradually carried out the interaction eliciting longer responses.

Moving to the third class, where the situation is slightly different in a way that the context is different, the teacher is a female, the students are the same age, level, have the language ability and but different gender and maybe educational background from the students in the first and the second class.

In extract 3 below, TC is eliciting grammar to check her students understanding of the grammatical rule being discussed. She is trying to elicit the students' answers for the first exercise of the grammar activity in their text books as a model to be followed and applied to the rest of the activity.

- 1 TC: (reading the head question of the activity) Complete these sentences, check
- 2 your answers with a partner, discuss the difference in meaning(.)Now you have
- 3 number one , When I <arrived> at the BBQ .<they> (0.5) eating burgers.(1)
- 4 What should we write here?
- 5 LL : they were..
- 6 TC: they were eating. So when I arrived is like when I came (referring to a
- 7 previously mentioned example) but eating takes more time so **THEY WERE**
- 8 eating. can I say was eating?=
9 L: =No
- 10 TC : Why?=
11 LL: they
- 12 TC: Because of they. excellent. Ok girls now you do the rest with your partner.

The extract opens with the teacher reading the grammar activity question and eliciting the first exercise answer as she read it with an electing intonation, some words were slowly pronounced and some were emphasized. Also, she paused where the student were supposed to fill the gap then she continued reading at line 3. This is followed by closed/display question that the teacher had previous knowledge of its answer (4). At line 5 learners succeeded in giving the correct answer. TC then provided a further explanation followed by repeating the correct answer to emphasize it(7,8) and a yes/no question at line 8 to make sure that her students didn't have any overlapping understanding and that the whole class have the best understanding of the assigned grammatical rule. This can also be clear at line 10 when TC asked 'why?' to reach more clarification. However, as one can see above, the students' responses were only one word and there were no room for any interaction.

In extract 3, the teacher's goal here is to only check the student understanding not aiming for any discussion or interaction and we can say the use of the closed/display-yes/no questions here is proper. Overall, the use of closed/display questions can be considered to explain and check grammar.

The frequency of the types of elicitation questions the teachers asked.

The total number of the elicitation questions asked by three different teachers in three different classes was 155. It is evident that the largest portion of the elicitation questions was devoted to

closed and display question, which has specific answer already known by the teacher. In the contrary, open/referential questions were rarely asked. (See Table 1).

Table 1. The frequency of the types of elicitation questions the teachers asked

Types of question	TA	TB	TC	Total
Yes/No questions	35(44.30%)	11(20%)	8(38, 09%)	54(34.38%)
Closed/display questions	40(50, 63%)	25(45, 45%)	13(61, 90%)	78(50%)
Open and referential questions	4(5, 06%)	19(34, 55%)	0(0%)	23(14.83%)

The type of questions asked most frequently by the teachers were closed and display questions with the total number of 78 questions out of 155 questions. The closed and display questions were asked to check students comprehension of a grammatical point or vocabulary item as seen above specially in extract 3. The second most frequently asked questions were yes/no questions (54 questions) that expect mainly yes or no type of responses. Yes/no questions were mainly used to get feedback from students and to make sure that they understood the taught item. Also, they are sometimes used as a starting point out of which the teacher begins to build and create his aimed objective. (Refer to extract 1). As it is noticeable to the reader, open/referential questions were the least frequently used (23 questions) and even TC asked none at all. Most of the open/referential questions were used before reading the text and also as a warm up questions (Refer to extract 1&2). To sum up, it is found that ELI teachers ask close/display questions and yes/no questions to a great extent while open referential questions are asked rarely.

Length of students' responses for different types of the elicitation questions asked by teachers

The effect of the different types of elicitation questions (illustrated above) on the length of the learners' responses are summarized below in Table 2. It is evident that the open/referential questions have the greatest effect on the learners' responses since they elicited the longest responses.

Table 2. Length of students' responses for different types of the elicitation questions asked by teachers

Types and length of responses	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Yes/no questions			
One word	33(94.29%)	10(83, 33%)	7(87, 5%)
Two /three words	2(5.71%)	2(16, 67%)	1(12, 5%)
Closed/display questions			
Three or less words	36(90%)	12(52, 11%)	9(100%)
More than 3 words	4(10%)	11(47, 83%)	0(0%)
Open/referential questions			
Three words	2(66, 67%)	8(36, 36%)	N/A
More than three words	1(33, 33%)	14(63, 63%)	N/A

In Table 2, it is noticeable that closed and displayed questions elicited the largest number of responses (36 responses) yet they are all less than three words. Also, it can be found that students' responses were very brief (one word) when the teacher asked yes/no question. However, when the open/referential questions were asked, the students' responses tended to be slightly longer. For example, in class 2 the students were able to provide 14 more than three words response to the teacher's open questions. To summarize the results of this section, the effect of types of elicitation questions on students' responses, in all the recorded lessons, is generally of short, shy and effortless responses. Only one word for the yes/no questions, no longer than four words for the display questions and the longer responses of four to seven words were only provided as answers to open/referential questions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on teachers' elicitation questions in ELI classrooms-the type of questions they ask, the most used type and the effect of these questions on classroom interaction and students responses. The results of the present study indicate that ELI teachers asked three different types of elicitation questions: yes/no questions closed displayed questions and open/referential questions. Moreover, these types are sometimes accompanied with an activity, picture, text or non-verbal language. Also, yes/no questions were overused while open/referential questions are largely ignored compared to the closed/display questions and to my own expectations. The use of each type depends on the teacher's pedagogical goal. In the data, two teachers run a pre-reading discussion but used different types of questioning that resulted in different quality of interaction. Both have same task but different goals. Therefore, it is suggested that –even though that the teacher is the one who determines her/his goal- to create a unified uses for each type that would fulfill the aimed purpose. For example, using yes/no question is more appropriate for checking comprehension while using close/display questions fits more when elicitation grammar (refer to extract 3) and vocabulary items. In other words, they are better be used if the goal was to engage learners in practicing the language. Here, we find no real interaction but the big aim is to enable learners to practice the language so that they can use it later in authentic communications. Further, devoting open/referential questions to discussions, speaking activities and sessions, brainstorming a topic...Etc., can be considered as well for a better effect because here the students are closer to the real and authentic interaction where they are demanded to express ideas, feelings, opinions and ideas rather than the structural practice.

As shown in the results, the effect of these questions on student's responses differs according to which type of questions the teacher used. Clearly, it is found that using open/referential questions got the longest responses yet the responses can't be called "a meaningful real interaction" as I expected it to be. In other words, the responses were not rich enough to be considered as communication. Still, they have the most influential impact on this group investigated in the data. Thinking through this, it is suggested that teachers should work even harder on their elicitation skills, especially the skill of asking open questions to practice actual elicitation in the classroom which will generate learners' wider responses and profitable classroom interaction. Overall, no matter what type of questions were asked the students responses were generally short.

The implication of this study is that teachers in second language classrooms needs to develop their understanding and wider their knowledge to master the art of elicitation techniques. To

promote a successful elicitation, it is proposed that: first, teachers should spend more time in illustrating and creating a clear context. Namely, they could give their students enough background reading the issue s/he is asking about because they will feel reluctant to speak not having any previous knowledge about the topic being discussed. Second, a skillful teacher should balance between all the types of elicitation questions that serve the variety of important purposes. In our case, teachers should use more open/referential questions for they are more related to providing longer responses that make a healthy interaction. In this point, teachers should gain more awareness regarding this type of questioning since it should never be ignored or minimized and create a pedagogical goal that demands the use of open/referential questions in an attempt to balance all the types. Third, teachers should also consider a "wait-time" to give students a space to think and formulate their responses which is rarely found in our observed classes. The teachers tend to interrupt thinking that this would help the students but not giving any proper time and interrupting really fast will cause in increasing teacher talk time and the absence of actual interaction. Finally, becoming a communicator rather than teacher and taking natural turns in the interaction will encourage the learner to produce higher levels of interaction because it will help them feel a sense of value and contribute in supporting their confidence. In brief, more researches on this topic need to be undertaken especially researchers that investigates open/referential questions and the elicitation questions combined with other items like pictures, texts, dialogue...Etc.

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APPENDIX:

Transcription conventions

Adapted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008)

(1.8) Numbers enclosed in parentheses indicate a pause. The number represents the number of seconds of duration of the pause, to one decimal place. A pause of less than 0.2 seconds is marked by (.)

[] Brackets around portions of utterances show that those portions overlap with a portion of another speaker's utterance.

= An equal sign is used to show that there is no time lapse between the portions connected by the equal signs. This is used where a second speaker begins their utterance just at the moment when the first speaker finishes.

:: A colon after a vowel or a word is used to show that the sound is extended. The number of colons shows the length of the extension. (hm, hh) These are onomatopoeic representations of the audible exhalation of air)

? A question mark indicates that there is slightly rising intonation.

. A period indicates that there is slightly falling intonation.

, A comma indicates a continuation of tone.

- A dash indicates an abrupt cut off, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly.

↑↓ Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is sharply rising or falling intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.

Under Underlines indicate speaker emphasis on the underlined portion of the word.

CAPS Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalized portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speaker's normal volume.

° This indicates an utterance that is much softer than the normal speech of the speaker. This symbol will appear at the beginning and at the end of the utterance in question.

><, <> 'Greater than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they surround was noticeably faster, or slower than the surrounding talk.

(would) When a word appears in parentheses, it indicates that the transcriber has guessed as to what was said, because it was indecipherable on the tape. If the transcriber was unable to guess as to what was said, nothing appears within the parentheses.

£C'mon£ Sterling signs are used to indicate a smiley or jokey voice.