

Teacher Talk in EFL Classrooms

A Look at Different Perspectives

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Abstract: Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji tuturan guru dari berbagai perspektif. Tuturan guru adalah jenis bahasa yang digunakan guru dalam proses belajar-mengajar. Lebih spesifik lagi, penelitian ini membicarakan tentang tuturan guru dalam setting kelas EFL. Ciri-ciri dari tuturan guru, banyaknya tuturan guru dalam setting kelas EFL adalah sangat penting untuk dibahas. Hasil dari beberapa penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahwa pembicaraan dalam kelas EFL didominasi oleh guru. Ini berarti bahwa pelajar hanya mendapatkan sedikit kesempatan untuk menggunakan *target language (TL)*. Guru memodifikasi tuturan dalam kelas EFL dalam berbagai cara. Mereka memodifikasi aspek interaksi, sintaktik, leksikal, dan fonologikal. Dengan menginvestigasi fenomena diatas, diharapkan pelajar dan guru dapat memperoleh manfaat.

Keywords: tuturan guru, pelajar, kelas EFL

Introduction

This mini paper presents some previous classroom research that has investigated teacher talk in EFL classroom settings. Teacher talk is the language used by teachers when they are teaching or communicating with learners. Teachers usually adjust their speech when they are talking to the learners. The characteristics of teacher talk are similar to that of foreigner talk, and motherese. The language they use with the learners when teaching differs from the language they use in natural situations (not instructed). There will be some phenomena discussed in this paper: teacher talk, amount of teacher talk, and characteristics of teacher talk. In addition, a conclusion will also be a part of this concise paper.

Analysis

A. Teacher Talk

Teacher talk is variety of language used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching (Richards *et al.* 1992). In communicating with the learners, teachers often modify their speech to a simple form to make language learners easier to understand and help them acquire the TL (Nunan 1986). This indicates that teacher talk is used to give learners a comprehensible input. In so doing, the learners might benefit from teacher talk. Another definition is proposed by Rod Ellis (1985) who says that teacher talk is the adjustment made by teachers in order to facilitate communication. He said that the adjustment could be in the form of function and form. From these two definitions it can be concluded that teacher talk is the language used by teachers in the learning-teaching process in order that teachers could communicate with their students and to make comprehensible input for the learners. Teachers often adjust their pronunciation, lexical items, and the speed of their speech to their students. By doing so, it is hoped that learning-

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teaching process could run better and the students could benefit from that process.

There has been lots of research conducted in the classrooms to investigate teacher talk in recent years. It is apparent that teacher talk in learning-teaching process is essential to take into account since teacher talk is so important for both learners and teachers. According to Nunan (1986), a number of studies have shown that native speakers (teachers and non-teachers alike) modify their speech when talking to non-native speakers in a number of different ways. Even in natural situations, native the speakers of a language sometimes modify their speech when talking to non-native speakers.

Nuril Huda (1999) cited Long who found that research on teacher talk in the classroom in general suggests that some of the findings are similar to the findings in the studies of foreigner talk. Teachers in EFL classrooms usually make linguistics adjustment and interactional modification. It has been suggested that these modifications and adjustments make the language easier to comprehend. As the results of these modifications and adjustments, the input might be more comprehensible and then become a good intake. In foreign language settings, like Indonesia, Thailand, and China, English teachers mostly are not native speakers of English. Thus, to some extent, teacher talk in foreign language settings is an interlanguage. It is the language produced by second or foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a language (Richards *et al.* 1992).

B. Amount of Teacher Talk in EFL Classrooms

Not surprisingly, classroom research has revealed that teachers tend to do most of talking in EFL classrooms. As an English teacher in Indonesia, our own experiences in the EFL classrooms indicate that we talk too much in front of our English learners. If we record our own learning-teaching process in EFL classrooms, we will be surprised that we dominate the class, which is not suggested in language classrooms. It was found that teachers tended to talk for about two-thirds of the available class time, leaving just a third for learners (Nunan 1986). He said that teachers talked for up to 89 percent of the available time in EFL classrooms. In this case, learners have only small opportunities to talk in the TL. It is surprising that teachers dominate the talking since in EFL classroom the students are supposed to be the central of learning-teaching process. When teachers dominate talking in EFL classrooms, this means that teachers are the central of learning teaching process, not learners, while in the EFL classrooms, learners must be the central of the learning-teaching process. Furthermore Nunan (1991) argued that in all classrooms, (not only language classrooms) teachers usually did most of the talking.

Chaudron cited Bellack (1986), Dunkin and Biddle (1974) who have established that teachers did most of the talking (about 60%) in the EFL classrooms. This means that learners do not have lots of opportunities to practice the TL. Sue Garton (2002), investigated an adult English learner in Italy. The results of her research showed that teachers dominated most of interaction in EFL classrooms. As mentioned

before, that learners should have enough opportunities to practice the TL so that they can learn that language. Unfortunately, teachers usually do most of the time talking in EFL classrooms. That is why; it is worth considering that teachers should provide more opportunities for the learners to use the TL in EFL classrooms.

C. Characteristics of Teacher Talk

One of the major aspects in teacher talk, according to Chaudron (1990), is teacher modification in his/her talk in EFL classroom settings. Ellis (1985) quoted some studies Henzl (1979), Gaises (1979), Long (1938) and Sato (1983) who investigated teacher talk in EFL classrooms. They found that formal adjustments occurred in all level of language classrooms. This means teachers usually adjust their speech to the learners. Their utterances are simpler on a range of measures of syntactic complexity when they address students than when they are talking not to the learners. In this case, their utterances could be slower, clearer, and easier to understand. Adjustments in pronunciation also exist in teacher talks. Those phenomena might provide a comprehensible input to the learners.

Chaudron (1990) cited some researchers who conducted research related to teacher talk in EFL classrooms. Some of them will be presented in the following sub chapter. According to him, the results of that research indicate that teachers usually modify their talk in four different areas: phonological, lexical, syntactical, and interactional areas. These four areas are general characteristics of teacher talk and will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

C.1. Phonological Modifications

Chaudron (1990) quoted Downes (1981), Wesche & Ready (1985), Mannon (1986), who reported that teachers modified their speech in EFL classrooms in different ways. However their research focused on phonological modification. Downes, for example, found that teachers used more exaggerated articulation and extended pauses in EFL classrooms. This means that teachers' pronunciation was slower and clearer than normal speech. Besides, teachers provided more time and phase when communicating with EFL learners. They might wait the learners and provide them with enough phases in communicating with them in order that they have opportunities to try the TL. This finding was in line with Mannon who reported that teachers slowed down their speech in EFL classrooms. Wesche and Ready found similar trends to those of the above findings. They said that teachers used slower speech, more long pause time in the learning-teaching process. These above findings showed us that the sound system of the target language could be modified in term of clearer articulation, slower rate, and more time pause in EFL classrooms.

C.2. Lexical Modification

Lexical modification is another modification used by the teachers in EFL classroom settings. In this modification, Mizon

(1981) quoted by Chaudron summarized some findings related to lexical modification. Mizon claimed that teachers used less variety of content and function words. This means teachers used less variety of words, which refer to a thing, quality, state, or action and which have meaning (lexical meaning). In this case, they did not use lots of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. In addition, they also used less function words, which refer to words, which have little meaning on their own: conjunctions, articles, prepositions. In his research, he claimed that in EFL classrooms, teachers usually provided fewer vocabularies rather than in natural communication. However, even in the natural communication, people could also find foreigner talk, which is similar to the teacher talk in EFL classrooms. When native speakers of a certain language talk to non-native speakers, they usually produce foreigner talk, which has similar characteristics of teacher talk. As Indonesian, when we talk to non-native speakers of Indonesian we adjust our speech in order that the non-native speakers could understand our utterances.

C.3 Syntactic Modification

Syntactic modifications is modifications of words or larger units (Richard, *et al.*1992). It can be grouped into five types: measures of length of utterances, measures of subordination, measures of markedness, measures of grammaticality, and measures of distribution of sentence types (Chaudron, 1990).

The first type of modification, measures of length of utterance, is the length of teacher utterances when talking to learners in EFL classrooms. There are conflicting findings on the length of utterances produced by teachers in EFL classrooms. Some studies show that teachers talk to non-natives is segmented to shorter utterances but some studies find equal lengths of utterances addressed to native-speaking and non-native speaking learners. Chaudron (1990) cited Mizon (1981) who found that teachers addressed the English native-speaking classes with longer utterances than to the English non-native speaking classes. This means that Mizon argues that teachers use shorter utterances to non-native speaker of a certain language in EFL classrooms. There were some other studies claiming that teachers used shorter utterances in EFL classroom settings, (Klifgen 1985, Henzl, 1979, Hakanson 1986). Even teachers and non-teachers adjusted their length of utterance downward for less proficient learners (Henzel 1973). These studies proved that teachers used modification of the length of utterances in EFL classrooms.

The second modification related to syntactic modification is measures of subordination. Henzl (1979) found that there was a tendency toward fewer subordinate clauses in non-native speaking conditions. This finding supports that in EFL classrooms teachers use fewer subordination. Gaies (1977) in Chaudron also stated that there was a trend that teachers used more subordinate

clauses as the level of the learners increased. This means that teachers use subordination in different ways, they use more subordination in higher level and fewer subordination in low-level classes.

The third syntactic modification in EFL classrooms is measures of markedness. Markedness is a theory that in the language of the world, certain linguistic elements are more basic, natural than others. For example, ***I like those people*** is considered to be unmarked, while ***Those people I like*** is considered to be marked. The results of previous classrooms research (Hanzi 1979; Wesche and Ready 1985; Mizon 1981) showed that there was the general lack of systematic comparability of measures of markedness across studies. It seemed clear that teachers adapted their speech to less proficient learners to some extent by using less marked structures (Chaudron 1990).

The next modification is measure of grammaticality. The ungrammatical utterances are sometimes used by teachers when talking to FL learners. Chaudron (1990) argued that the ungrammatical utterances typically involved omissions of functions words, of copula, of subject or object pronouns, and articles. He cited Pica and Long (1986) who found that experienced teachers produced fewer dysfluencies than inexperienced ones.

The last modification is measures of sentence types distribution. This concerns the relative use of declarative forms, interrogative, and imperatives. Chaudron cited Mizon (1981), Early (1985), Ishiguro (1986) who found that teachers used more declarative forms rather than the other two forms, (interrogatives and imperatives). This indicates that teachers talk a lot in EFL classroom settings. The interrogative forms are used just to check the learners' comprehension or understanding of the topic being discussed. Besides, this also gives an impression that teachers dominate the talk in EFL classrooms.

C.4. Modification of Interaction

Modification of interaction or interactional adjustments as one of the characteristics of teacher talk also occurs in the learning-teaching process in EFL classrooms. Ellis (1985) claimed that interactional adjustment in EFL classrooms was similar to those observed in motherese (e.g. repetition, prompting, and expansions). It is apparent that in EFL classrooms, display questions (the questions in which teachers have already known the answers) are more frequent than in natural settings. He quoted Long and Sato (1983) who found that in the classroom interactions learners had few opportunities to speak, teachers dominated most of the talk. They found that characteristics of teacher talk in EFL classrooms were similar to those of foreigner talk.

Teachers do lots of self-repetitions in EFL classrooms. This could happen because the repetitions may provide learners with more opportunities to process the information or follow the teachers' model. Some studies found that most of the teachers (experienced and inexperienced) often did self-repetitions in EFL classrooms. Chaudron quoted Pica and Long (1986) who did not find any differences in frequency of self-repetitions between experienced and inexperienced teachers. This indicates that all teachers in EFL classrooms usually make self-repetitions in interacting with the learners.

Conclusion

This mini paper discusses some phenomena related to teacher talk in EFL classrooms. It is found that teachers talk a lot in EFL classroom settings. This means that learners have few opportunities to practice the TL when they are in the learning-teaching process. There has been much research on teacher talk in EFL classrooms. This interest reflects the importance of such talk in language teaching to be observed.

Looking at the results of some previous research related to teacher talk in EFL classrooms, teachers usually use some of the following teacher talk characteristics. They use slower and louder pronunciation, simpler vocabularies and grammar.

It is important to note that teachers are encouraged not to talk too much in EFL classrooms because the ultimate goal of learning-teaching process in EFL classrooms is to make the learner able to use the TL. It is also suggested that researchers conduct classroom research since there is unlimited phenomena that can be investigated in the EFL classroom settings.

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