

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER TALK IN EFL CLASS - A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Teacher talk is of vital importance to language learning, and it serves a fundamental role in the process of language acquisition as stated by Nunan (1991).

It is argued that in EFL classroom contexts, teacher talk should be carefully considered and should concentrate on its quality in promoting L2 input. However, the majority of previous studies mainly focused on the excessive teacher talking time while there is a limited number of studies discussing the relationship between teacher talk and student's language learning.

Therefore, this research intends to suggest a theoretical framework, in which the teacher talk features and their influences on student learning could be examined. As indicated from the theoretical framework, teacher talk could be presented either directly or indirectly by the teacher which would consequently discourage or promote student participation in class.

Keywords: teacher talk, classroom interaction

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, although there has been an advocacy of “learner-centered” teaching approach in English language teaching, teachers still perform a significant role in developing students’ language output through a unique medium that is teacher talk.

According to Nunan (1991), teacher talk is essential for not only the organization of the classroom but also the process of language acquisition. Therefore, the use of it can have either positive or negative influences on students’ language output.

When investigating the effect of teacher talk on student learning, it is worth considering both the quality and quantity of teacher talk. Most present studies tend to focus on the excessive teacher talking time and criticize that this domination would result in disadvantageous outcomes on students’ language learning. However, these findings seem not to convincingly reflect the quality of teacher talk as well as its influence on student’s language learning in class.

Therefore, this paper is intended to provide a theoretical framework, in which teacher talk features and their effects on student learning could be analyzed. From a practical view, this framework hopefully could assist teachers in evaluating the quality of their talk, thus aiding them to better adjust and perform their verbal behaviors in a way that can promote student learning in class.

TEACHER TALK AND ITS ROLES

As defined in The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, teacher talk is “that variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching”. It is the language of the teacher in the classroom that accounts for the majority of class time to convey information to learners, give directions, explain activities and check students’ understanding and control learner behavior (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982).

Teacher talk is presented in class in different stages such as teacher’s classroom management, teacher’s delivery of instructions, teacher’s transfer of knowledge, teacher’s interaction with students and teacher’s responding to students’ answers. In general, teachers are likely to employ the target language for two main purposes: promoting their

communication with learners (by helping their learners practice the language by responding to what they say) and encouraging the communication between learners and themselves.

According to Nunan (1991), teacher talk plays a fundamental role in the process of language acquisition. “Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in implementing their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is important because it is probably the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive.”

Therefore, it can be inferred that teacher talk in the EFL classroom serves at least three functions. First, it plays the role of valuable input for the target language exposure. Second, it helps to make the input comprehensible and consequently create the favorable condition for the learning to take place. Third, it can assist to organize and manage class activities as well as stimulate the interaction in class.

However, as shown by numerous previous studies, teacher talk can result in some negative impacts in the classroom since excessive teacher talking time (TTT) could deprive students of opportunities to speak. Therefore, not only the quantity of teacher talk but also the quality needs to be put into careful consideration in the interaction between teacher and students in the classroom.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO ANALYZE TEACHER TALK

In order to analyze classroom interaction as well as teacher talk, there is one well-known framework, namely FLint (Foreign Language interaction) system proposed by Moskowitz in 1971.

FLint system is comprised of thirteen categories; seven of which are teacher talk; two of which are student talk; and the last is silence or confusion in the classroom.

The seven categories of teacher talk are further classified into two main groups, namely indirect and direct influence which indicate the extent of students’ freedom given through

teacher’s verbal behaviors. The former includes categories: 1) deals with feelings, 2) praises and encourages, 3) uses ideas of students and 4) asks questions. The latter involves categories: 5) giving information, 6) giving directions and 7) criticizing student behavior.

Indirect influence promotes students’ freedom in class while direct influence restricts students’ exercise of freedom.

Regarding student talk, there are two categories: 8) Student response, specific and 9) Student response - open-ended or student-initiated. These two categories refer to the types of questions posed by the teacher such as close ended or open ended questions that students answer in class.

Lastly, there are three extra features assumed to be combined with a number of categories of teacher and students talk. They involve silence (including silence during audio visual equipment playing time), confusion: work-oriented or non-work oriented confusion, laughter, the use of the native language, and nonverbal gestures.

After careful consideration, in order to facilitate the researcher’s observation, certain categories of teacher talk are further classified into stages of the typical classroom discourse between the teacher and learner – Initiation-Response-Feedback. Thus, a theoretical framework to analyze teacher talk was adapted from FLint as follows,

A theoretical framework to analyze teacher talk (adapted from FLint)

<p>Teacher talk</p>		<p>1. Deals with feelings: in a non-threatening way, accepting, discussing, referring to or communicating understanding of past, present, or future feelings students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Feedback:</i> <p>2. Praises or encourages: Praising, complimenting, telling students why what they have said or down is valued. Encouraging students to continue, trying to give them confidence, confirming that answers are correct.</p> <p>Jokes: Intentional joking, kidding, making puns,</p>
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	<p>Indirect influence</p>	<p>attempting to be humorous, providing the joking is not anyone’s expense. (Unintentional humor is not included in this category.)</p> <p>3. Uses ideas of students: Clarifying, using, interpreting, summarizing the ideas of students. The ideas must be rephrased by the teacher but still be recognized as being student contributions.</p> <p>Repeats student response verbatim: Repeating the exact words of students after they participate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Initiation/Feedback:</i> <p>4. Asks questions: asking questions to which the answer is anticipated. (Rhetorical questions are NOT included in this category.)</p>
	<p>Direct influence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Initiation/Feedback:</i> <p>5. Gives information: giving information, facts, own opinion, or ideas: lecturing or asking rhetorical questions, telling students who have made mistakes the correct response without using words or intonations which communicate criticism.</p> <p>6. Gives directions: Giving directions requests or commands that students are expected to follow; directing various drills; facilitating whole-class and small-group activity.</p> <p>7. Criticizes student behavior: Rejecting the behavior of students; trying to change the non-acceptable behavior; communicating anger, displeasure, annoyance, dissatisfaction with what students are doing.</p> <p>Criticizes student response: telling the student his or her</p>

		<p>response is not correct or acceptable and communicating criticism, displeasure, annoyance, rejection by words or intonation.</p>
Student talk		<p>8. Student response, specific: Responding to the teacher within a specific and limited range of available or previously practiced answers. Reading aloud, dictation, drills.</p> <p>Student response, choral: Choral response by the total class or part of the class.</p> <p>9. Student response - open-ended or student-initiated: responding to the teacher with students' own ideas, opinions, reactions, feelings. Giving one from among many possible answers that have been previously practiced but from which students must now make a selection. Initiating the participation.</p>
Silence or confusion		<p>10. Silence: Pauses in the interaction. Periods of quite during which there is no verbal interaction.</p> <p>Silence-Audiovisual: Silence in the interaction during which a piece of audiovisual equipment, e.g., a tape recorder, filmstrip projector, record player, etc., is being used to communicate.</p> <p>Confusion, work-oriented: More than one person at a time talking, so the interaction cannot be recorded. Students calling out excitedly, eager to participate or respond, concerned with the task at hand.</p> <p>Confusion, non-work-oriented: More than one person at a time talking so the interaction cannot be recorded. Students out of order, not behaving as the teacher wishes, not concerned</p>

		with the task at hand.
		<p>These categories are always combined with one of the categories from 1 to 9.</p> <p>11. Laughter: Laughing and giggling by the class, individuals, and/or the teacher.</p> <p>12. Uses the native language: Use the native language by the teacher or the students.</p> <p>13. Nonverbal: Gestures or facial expressions by the teacher or the students that communicate without the use of words.</p>

Indirect influence refers to teacher talk actions that encourage learners and expand their opportunities to participate in class activities as well as in the interaction with the teacher, which is beneficial for student learning. In contrast, direct influence demonstrates teacher talk practices that limit the actions of learners and restrict their participation and interaction in the classroom, which is disadvantageous to student learning.

Hence, this model can be employed for the purpose of observing and analyzing the classroom interaction. It can be used as a reflection for teachers to notice what kind of verbal interaction they use and what kind of response is given by the students in class, from which a conclusion about the impact of such behaviors on student learning could be reached.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when evaluating the impact of teacher talk on student learning, it is essential to analyze not only its quantity but also its quality, which could be achieved by examining the teacher talk practices falling into indirect and direct influence categories.

If teachers perform more indirect teacher talk which includes dealing with feelings, praising and encouraging, using ideas of students and asking questions, they are promoting student’s participation in the process of language acquisition. In contrast, should teachers

utilize more direct teacher talk which comprises giving information, giving directions and criticizing student behavior, it can be indicated that student learning to a certain extent is being obstructed by the teacher.

Thus, a careful examination of such teacher talk behaviors could support teachers in their conduction of effective classroom interaction that can promote student learning.

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