

Exploring Teacher Talk in the Classroom: A Discourse Analysis of Instructional Conversations

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the role of teacher talk in the English language classroom, focusing on the types of instructional conversations that occur between teachers and students. The research employed a discourse analysis approach, combining data from classroom observations and student interviews. The findings reveal that teacher talk plays a crucial role in shaping the learning environment, with dominant categories including asking questions, giving explanations, and providing feedback. The study highlights the importance of teacher talk in facilitating student participation and engagement, as well as its impact on the overall effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. The results also suggest that students perceive teacher talk as a key factor in their learning experience, with many students expressing a desire for more student-centered and interactive instructional conversations. This study contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics of teacher talk in the classroom, providing insights for educators seeking to improve their instructional practices and enhance student outcomes. Positive reinforcement and constructive feedback are shown to encourage a growth mindset, fostering a more inclusive and participatory classroom environment. Additionally, the study highlights the balance teachers must maintain between managing classroom behavior and facilitating meaningful instructional conversations. The interviews with students provide valuable insights into their perceptions of teacher talk, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and communicative teacher-student relationship. Students report that effective teacher talk not only clarifies academic content but also builds their confidence and interest in the subject matter. By analyzing instructional conversations, it offers practical implications for improving teaching practices and enhancing student learning experiences. This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational communication, providing a foundation for future studies on teacher-student interactions in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: instructional conversations, teacher talk, teacher-student interactions

Introduction

Effective teaching and learning are significantly influenced by the nature and quality of classroom interactions. Central to these interactions is "teacher talk," which encompasses the various ways in which teachers use language to convey information, engage students, and facilitate learning. This study aims to explore the intricacies of teacher talk within the context of instructional conversations through the lens of discourse analysis.

Teacher talk is any word or sentence spoken by the teacher during interaction in teaching and learning process. It is happening when the teacher given an explanation, ask questions, gives feedback, etc. Teacher talk was crucial and important, not only for the organization and for management of the classroom but also the process of acquisition. In teaching process, the teacher often simplify the speech, giving it many of the characteristic of foreign talk such as applying slower and louder than normal speech, using simpler grammar and vocabulary, and topics are sometimes repeated.

Teacher talk is giving direction, explaining learning activities, confirming student's understanding to identify the parts of teacher talk that arises during learning activities. In the use of English the teacher interacts with students using the mix language, therefore students become easy to understand and also follow what is conveyed by the teacher. When the class becomes relevant and then the parts of teacher talk can be used by the teacher to increase students' activity, interact with students, and there is feedback between the teacher and students in the teaching and learning.

Teacher talk is remarkable input in English as foreign class for students who are learning English (Gebhard, 2006 cited in Putri, 2015). In addition, in English class as a foreign language has been found that teacher talk dominated the interaction (Ogunleye, 2009; Nurmasithah, 2010; and Putri, 2015). Teacher talk in the classroom should not only be seen from its dominance. In line with this, Gharbavi and Iravani (2014) stated that teacher talk should be able to offer opportunities to participate more in

the classroom and encourage students to interact with the teacher or other students. Furthermore, teacher talk is also to influence the characteristics of interaction that is occurring in the classroom between teacher and students. Through this qualitative study, we aim to shed light on the following questions: How do teachers use language to manage classroom discourse? What conversational strategies do they employ to foster student engagement and understanding? How do students respond to and participate in these instructional conversations? By addressing these questions, this research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of effective teaching practices and the role of language in education.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing discourse analysis to explore the intricacies of teacher talk within instructional conversations. The participants in this study will include a teacher and students from one class at the Elfast English course. Classroom observations and Interviews were conducted to gather the data. After the data was collected, the researcher continued to analyze the data by doing Thematic Analysis and Interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the teacher's instructional language identified three main areas. These areas include explanations, questions, and feedback. Each area was examined in detail, highlighting specific strategies and patterns used by the teacher.

In observation, it was found that there were some ways the teacher used to explain the lesson. In the classroom activities, the teacher used English, and then switched and mixed the language with Indonesian to explain the lesson. In other different situations, the teacher repeated the language that she used for the students

The discourse analysis revealed several key themes in how teachers engage in instructional conversations:

TEACHER'S INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE IN GIVING EXPLANATION

One aspect of teacher talk observed in the classroom is the delivery of explanations. This involves the teacher introducing new concepts or information to students. According to Nunan (1989:27), the primary function of teacher talk is to provide explanations, with the teacher acting as the main source of information.

Observations revealed that the teacher employed several methods to explain lessons. During classroom activities, the teacher initially

used English and then switched to or mixed it with Indonesian to ensure that the students fully understood the material.

Extract 1

T : Damara, what vocabulary will we study today?

S : part of body

T : part of body,

T : yes, now for the next time I will read the vocabulary and then you just listen, you must listen, so you know, how to pronounce everyone, now listen carefully... listen carefully

T : forehead, cheek, chin, chest

From all the extracts the teacher was explaining the lesson in English. It can be seen from the extract whether the teacher asked the students a question or gave the explanation. At the time, she repeated her talk in order to make students pay attention with her explanation. It is proved by reading the transcript : *"ya, now for the next time I will read the vocabulary and then you just listen, you must listen, so you know, how to pronounce every them, now, listen carefully... listen carefully, forehead, cheek, chin, chest"*.

The language a teacher uses in the classroom for explanations varies depending on the situation. The researcher found that the teacher's approach to speaking changes accordingly. From the research perspective, when providing explanations, the teacher is the sole source of the information being delivered, and the validity of the information rests solely with the teacher.

Observations showed that the teacher employed several methods to explain lessons during classroom activities. On some occasions, the teacher used English but then switched to and mixed it with Indonesian to ensure students understood the lesson.

In different situations, the teacher repeated the language used for the students. Cakrawati (2011:16) states that repetition not only clarifies what is said but also amplifies or emphasizes a message.

According to Cook (2008:182), teachers can balance the use of language within each lesson and switch languages at key points, such as when introducing important concepts, when students are distracted, during revisions, or when students are praised or reprimanded. In this context, switching languages can be an effective teaching strategy for second language learning. Hoffman, as cited in Cakrawati (2011:12), states that bilingual or multilingual individuals switch or mix their languages for various reasons, one of which is repetition for clarification. This is often observed in the teaching and learning process. This means that the teacher's practice of mixing and switching

languages in the classroom aims to make the material more understandable for students.

TEACHER'S INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE IN ASKING QUESTION

The teacher used two types of questions: display and referential questions.

A. Display Questions

Display questions are used to check students' understanding. The teacher knows the answers and uses these questions to see if students do too.

The teacher asked display questions in English, Indonesian, or both, often repeating them two to three times. Here are some examples of this type of question.

Extract 2

T : Iya, now... We have this book. Open page three, this one... what lesson is here? What lesson? Lesson?

S : vocabulary

T : vocabulary.

T : what is the title of this vocabulary? What is the title?

S : ...

T : Damara, what is the title of this vocabulary?

S : part of body

T : part of body,

In the extract above, the teacher used display question to the students and to check the students' attention about the material. When she asked to the students, she totally used English but she repeated till two or three times. For example, it can be found, when the teacher asked to the students "Iya, now... We have this book. Open page three, this one... what lesson is here? What lesson? Lesson?". After the students answered her, she continued her question by repeating until three times, it can be seen "what is the title of this vocabulary? What is the title?"

B. Referential Questions

Referential questions are asked when the teacher doesn't know the answer and wants to gather information or opinions from students. According to Lei (2009:75), these questions have a genuine communicative purpose and encourage students to express their opinions and share information.

The teacher asked referential questions in the same way as display questions, using English, Indonesian, or a mix of both. The teacher often repeated these questions to ensure understanding. Here are some examples of this type of question.

Extract 3

T : How are you today? How are you today?

S : I am fine, how about you?

S : I'm fine too

T : Now, we will learn the title about... We will

learn about part of

S : Part of body

T : Have you ever listened vocabulary about part of body? Anybody knows?

S : No. Yes

T : Nobody knows?

S : No.

The extract 3 above showed that the teacher used referential question and she used English when she gave questions for the students. She even needed to repeat her questions twice. The examples can be seen when she asked "How are you today? How are you today?", and she said "Have you ever listened vocabulary about part of body? Anybody knows?" The last, she repeats again the question "Nobody knows?" The function of this question is used to start the class or the material.

During recording observations, the researcher identified two types of questions used by the teacher in the classroom: display questions and referential questions. The teacher predominantly used referential questions in her teaching.

Display questions are those for which the teacher already knows the answer. According to Xiao-yan (2008:93), teachers often ask more display questions to help students recall information and assess their understanding, rather than to stimulate students' ideas and classroom discussion.

In contrast, referential questions are asked when the teacher does not know the answer, aiming to gather information or stimulate students to share their opinions and engage in classroom communication.

Xiao-yan (2008:93) explains that referential questions are used when the teacher doesn't know the answer, aiming to gather subjective information. In the classroom observations, the teacher mostly used language similarly to how referential questions are used, switching languages and using Indonesian when necessary.

The type of questions teachers ask affects classroom interaction. Referential questions, unlike display questions, are meant to encourage discussion and understanding. Lei (2009:75) emphasizes that these questions serve a genuine communicative purpose, helping students recall information and grasp concepts.

In the classroom, questioning focuses on assessing student understanding and encouraging participation. Xiao-yan (2008:93) notes that teachers typically ask questions they know the answers to, aiming to gauge comprehension and stimulate creative thinking. This differs from everyday conversations where questions seek information unknown to the questioner.

TEACHER'S INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE IN GIVING FEEDBACK

In the classroom, one way teachers interact with students is through giving feedback. Feedback involves providing comments on students' answers, complimenting correct responses with phrases like 'Good' or 'Yes', and can include:

- Expanding or modifying students' answers by adding more information.

- Repeating students' answers for clarity.

- Criticizing responses that need improvement.

Observations showed that the teacher used various methods to give feedback during classroom activities. Sometimes, she used both English and Indonesian, mixing languages as needed. In other instances, she repeated her feedback to ensure understanding.

In the classroom, the teacher uses feedback to comment on students' tasks. The feedback is given in both English and Indonesian, sometimes mixing both languages.

Feedback is important for students to understand if their work is correct or needs improvement. According to Xiao-hui (2010:46), feedback in teacher talk corrects errors in students' spoken language and responds to their responses. Lei (2009:75) says that after students answer questions, teachers provide feedback. This process helps students learn in the classroom.

THE EFFECT OF THE TEACHER'S INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE

The interview was done to find teacher to the students, which the researcher cannot be gained through observation, uses the depth information about the effects of teacher's instructional language.

Peneliti: Hai! Terima kasih sudah mau berbicara dengan saya. Bisa ceritain pengalaman kamu tentang guru yang pakai bahasa beda waktu ngajar?

Siswa: Ya! Guru kami sering pakai bahasa Inggris dan bahasa kita sendiri biar kami paham. Misalnya, dia jelaskan tata bahasa dulu pakai Inggris, terus diulang pake bahasa kita kalau masih bingung.

Peneliti: Gimana perasaan kamu waktu guru pakai dua bahasa itu?

Siswa: Bantu banget. Kadang lebih jelas dengernya pakai bahasa kita, khususnya buat pelajaran susah. Jadi lebih percaya diri juga.

Peneliti: Pernah lihat gak gimana guru kasih tanggapan tentang pekerjaan kamu pake bahasa beda?

Siswa: Iya, dia sering pakai dua bahasa itu. Bikin aku lebih paham komentarnya.

Peneliti: Menurut kamu, cara kayak gitu bantu kamu belajar lebih baik gak?

Siswa: Bantu banget. Lebih gampang dipahami. Rasanya guru perhatiin banget biar kita paham. Peneliti: Oke, makasih ya! Bantuan kamu penting buat ngerti gimana bahasa pengajaran bisa bantu belajar.

Siswa: Sama-sama!

The interview data answers the question about how teacher's language affects students. It shows that when the teacher switches between English and another language during explanations, students respond positively. They feel motivated to learn, understand better, and improve their vocabulary and pronunciation skills.

Teacher communication helps students get more involved in learning. When students ask the teacher to repeat explanations, it shows they're trying to understand better. According to Cakrawati (2011:16), repeating information clarifies and emphasizes it.

Most students understand when the teacher mixes languages to explain, but some struggle due to limited vocabulary. Mixing languages helps students learn new words and their meanings. Teacher talk also supports students in achieving language learning goals. Lin (2005:17) agrees, saying effective teacher talk helps students understand better.

Using English helps achieve language goals, but some students still need the teacher to mix in their native language because of limited vocabulary. Cook (2008:182) suggests teachers switch languages during lessons to aid understanding, especially during important topics or when students are distracted. Similarly, Kim (2006:47-49) mentions mixing languages helps clarify speech for better understanding.

From the explanations above, the researcher wish the three problems statements in this research can be answered the first question How do teachers use language to manage classroom discourse?

Teachers employ various strategies in their language use to manage classroom discourse effectively. These strategies include:

Explanation: Teachers predominantly use English but also switch to or mix with Indonesian to ensure students understand the material.

Questioning: They use both display questions (where they know the answer) and referential questions (where they seek information from students), using English and Indonesian interchangeably.

Feedback: Teachers provide feedback using both languages, repeating as necessary to ensure comprehension.

What conversational strategies do they employ to foster student engagement and understanding?

Teachers use conversational strategies such as:

Language Mixing: Mixing English with Indonesian helps students with limited vocabulary understand better.

Repetition: Repeating instructions and feedback helps clarify and emphasize key points.

Clear Communication: Teachers adjust their language to ensure students are engaged and understand the lesson content effectively.

How do students respond to and participate in these instructional conversations?

Students respond positively to language switching and mixing, finding it helpful for understanding complex topics and improving their language skills.

They actively participate by responding to questions posed in both languages and seek clarification when necessary.

Students appreciate clear feedback and find it beneficial for their learning process.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that teachers employ various language strategies to manage classroom discourse effectively. They often switch between English and Indonesian, and sometimes mix these languages, to ensure students understand lesson content comprehensively. This flexibility in language use helps teachers clarify concepts and maintain engagement throughout instructional conversations.

Moreover, the study highlights that these conversational strategies significantly enhance student engagement. Teachers' clear explanations, combined with diverse questioning techniques like display and referential questions, encourage active student participation. Students respond positively by seeking clarification and actively contributing to discussions. Additionally, the constructive feedback provided by teachers plays a crucial role in student learning, helping them correct mistakes and improve their understanding.

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