

A STUDY OF TEACHER TALK IN CLASSROOM INTERACTION AT AN ISLAMIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract:

This study investigated interactional features performed by English teacher during teaching learning process in classroom interaction, how the teacher performed it, and how interactional features helped the teacher to achieve pedagogic goal. This study used descriptive qualitative method. The data was collected by using audio-video recording and field notes. The result showed that the English teacher performed eleven interactional features out of fourteen in the classroom those are scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, seeking clarification, confirmation check, teacher echo, teacher interruption, extended teacher turn, display question and extended learner turn. Related to pedagogic goal, only teacher interruption did not help the teacher in achieving any pedagogic goal.

Keywords:

Teacher Talk, Classroom Interaction, Interactional Features, Pedagogic Goal

Introduction

The language used by the teacher or teacher talk has important role that influences the success of English learning process. Teacher talk is used to guide the learning activity of the students in constructing a joint and share the educational knowledge with the students. In attempting to guide learning, the

teacher uses talk to do three things: (1) *Elicit relevant knowledge from students*, so that they can see what students already know and understand; (2) *Respond to things that students say*; (3) *Describe the classroom experiences that they share with students* in such a way that the educational significance of those

joint experiences is revealed and emphasized.¹

According to Krashen's input hypothesis, teacher talk for the learner is generally recognized as a potentially valuable source of comprehensible input which is viewed as an essential for language acquisition.² For this reason, it is important to the teachers should realize how much they themselves talk, and what kind of talk should be performed.³ Cullen stated that while the question of how much teachers talk is still important, more emphasis is given to how effectively they are able to facilitate learning and promote communicative interaction in their classroom through.

Interaction in the classroom is considered as an activity that provides opportunities for the teacher and students talking with each other in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, interaction is one of important elements to the teaching process. As Clipperton in Takahasi et. al noted teaching has to be

purposeful, interactive and creative.⁴ While the key to interactive teaching as Brown stated is to strive toward the upper, non-directive end of the continuum, gradually enabling the students to move from their roles of total dependence to relatively total independent.⁵

However, the interaction in a language classroom is very complicated. Many problems appeared to develop teaching learning process through a communicative interaction because students get a difficulty in expressing themselves in using English language which is not their mother tongue. Therefore, the ways of teacher both using language and giving the students opportunity in developing language are very important to understand. In other words, teacher talk which is aimed to establish and maintain good communicative practices in the complex series discourse, takes a great proportion in the classroom. Therefore, through investigating interaction in classroom,

¹Mercer, Neil Mercer. *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk Amongst Teachers and Learners*. (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1995), 25.

²Richard Cullen. Teacher Talk and the Classroom Context. *English Language Teaching Journal* Vol. 25 No. 3, 179.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Etsuko Takahashi, Austin, Theresa, and Marimoto, Yoko.. Social Interaction and Language Development in a FLES Classroom. In J. K. Hall & L. S. Verplaetse (Eds.), "*Second and Foreign Language Learning Through Classroom Interaction*". London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. 2000.

⁵H. Douglas Brown. *Teaching by Principles; An interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (New York: Person Educatio, 2001), 168.

teachers will be able to develop their awareness of applying appropriate teacher talk in teaching.

Before 2000s, there has been some Foreign Language interaction analysis models designed to help investigating and understanding the relationship between teachers talk and language learning like the work of Flanders in 1970 and FLINT in 1971 by Gertrude Moskowitz in Brown.⁶ But, Walsh stated that the categories in Flanders's work are rather broad and it is questionable whether the instrument could adequately account for the complex interactional organization on contemporary classroom.⁷ While FLINT, according to Wallace as quoted in Walsh though more sophisticated than the original Flanders System, it is also more complex and Moskowitz recommended that user should master the Flanders system before employing her modified version.⁸ Therefore, Seedhouse (1996:23) suggested in attempt to evaluate classroom communication, the characteristic features related to

pedagogical purpose should be considered.⁹

SETT (Self-Evaluation Teacher Talk) offers a new approach to help a teacher develops a clearer understanding of the relationship between teacher talk, interaction and learning that was proposed by Walsh.¹⁰ SETT framework is designed to raise awareness of teacher talk, a realization of the importance of using appropriate teacher talk according to pedagogic goals because the language used by the teachers in the classroom varies according to their pedagogic purpose at a given point in a lesson. In other words, pedagogy and interaction come together through talk: pedagogic goals are manifested in the talk-in-interaction.

From rationales above, this study outlines three research questions: "What are interactional features of English teacher talk in a classroom?", "How does the English teacher perform interactional features of talk in a classroom?" and "How do interactional features help the English teacher achieve pedagogic goal in a classroom?". The purpose is to describe

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Steve Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 42.

⁸ Ibid. 42..

⁹ Paul, Seedhouse. "Classroom Interaction: Possibilities and Impossibilities". *English Language Teaching Journal*, 1996. Vol. 50 No. 1., 23

¹⁰ Steve Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

how interactional features are performed by English teacher in a classroom and to describe whether pedagogic goal are achieved by the teacher or not. The point to be noted is that the interactional features in this study are classified into fourteen features of teacher talk proposed by Walsh.¹¹

Theoretical Framework

Classroom Interaction

Ellis pointed out that it is useful to distinguish two different but related meanings of “interaction”.¹² First, interaction can be viewed as the social behavior that occurs when one person communicates with another. Interaction in this sense is *interpersonal*. It can occur face-to-face, in which case it usually takes place through the oral medium, or it can occur as displaced activity, in which case it generally involves the written medium. Second, interaction can occur inside our minds, both when we engage in the kind of private speech and more covertly, when different modules of the mind interact to construct an understanding of or a

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rod Ellis. Learning a Second Language through Interaction. In K. D. Bot & T. Huebner (Eds.), *Studies in Bilingualism*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

response to some phenomenon. Interaction in this kind is *Intrapersonal*. Classroom interaction plays important role in succeeding language learning process. Allwright as stated in Ellis sees interaction as the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy because everything that happens in the classroom happens through a process of live person-to-person interaction.¹³ A more social view, Allwright et al. stated interaction with other language users as essential to acquisition, and considers the quality of that social experience crucial to successful classroom language learning.¹⁴

Teacher Talk and Pedagogic Goal

Sinclair as quoted by Yanfen and Yuqin gave definition of teacher talk is that the language in the classroom that takes up a major portion of class time employed to give directions, explain activities and check students' understanding.¹⁵ Teacher talk is the language that teacher convey to

¹³Rod Ellis. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition (Oxford Applied Linguistics)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 565.

¹⁴Dick Allwright and Judith Hanks, *The Developing Language Learner: An Introduction to Exploratory Practice*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009), 93.

¹⁵ Liu Yanfen and Zhao Yuqin. “A Study of Teacher Talk in Interactions in English Classes. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics (Bimonthly)*” Vol. 33 No. 2, 2010. 77.

the students in order to organize the activities in the classroom and assist students in the process of acquisition. Teacher talk has its own specific features. It is different with talk outside the classroom. The teacher in the process of teaching and learning simplified and modified their talk more comprehensible thus student is easier in understanding the target language.

According to Walsh contexts are locally constructed by participants through and in their interaction in the light of overall institutional goals and immediate pedagogic objective.¹⁶ In other words, pedagogy and interaction come together through talk: pedagogic goals are manifested in the talk-in-interaction. Using the term mode encompasses the interrelatedness of language use and teaching purpose. From this rationale, a framework Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) was proposed by Walsh in which using term mode, typical pedagogical goals together with interactional features.

Interactional Features

Interactional features refer to specific interactional features of classroom discourse that may help or hinder

¹⁶Steve Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. 62.

communication. Things like wait time, confirmation check, display question, etc are examples of interactional features.¹⁷ In his study of teacher talk, Walsh found that certain interactional features facilitated learning opportunity, while others appeared to hinder opportunities for learning.¹⁸ That is, depending on a teacher's pedagogical goal, choice of language could either construct or obstruct learning opportunity.

There are fourteen interactional features which were proposed by Walsh.¹⁹ They are scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, referential questions, seeking clarification, confirmation checks, extended learner turn, teacher echo, teacher interruption, extended teacher turn, turn completion, display question and form-focused feedback.

Methods

A descriptive qualitative method is employed in this study which tries to

¹⁷Steve Walsh. *Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 219.

¹⁸Steve Walsh. "Construction or Obstruction: Teacher Talk and Learner Improvement in the EFL calssroom. *Language Teaching Research*". Vol. 6 No. 1, 3-23. 2002.

¹⁹Steve Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*.

describe all phenomena that occurred in the classroom. Cullen argued that there is a need to analyze teacher's use of language from a qualitative rather than quantitative perspective.²⁰ 'Good' teacher talk does not necessarily mean 'little' teacher talk; rather, effective teacher talk 'facilitates learning and promote communicative interaction'.

This study involved an English teacher as research subject in his class. The subject of this study has implemented English talk as a means of communication in learning process of his classroom. The subject here is a male teacher who has been teaching English for twenty one years and graduated from the Flinders University of South Australia. This study was conducted in MAN Insan Cendikia located in Jambi city. This school belongs to a national standardized State Islamic Senior High School. In particular, this study was done in twelfth grade. This class consists of 24 students with 11 are males and 13 are females.

The main data was taken through observation technique. The data was collected by using audio-video recording and field notes. Interview was the further

technique used to find the essence of what could not be found through observation. Data analysis was done by using Interactive Model taken from Miles et al.²¹

Findings and Discussions

From analysis done, it was found that English teacher performed eleven interactional features out of fourteen in the classroom. The features were scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait-time, seeking clarification, confirmation check, teacher echo, teacher interruption, extended teacher turn, display question and extended learner turn.

Scaffolding

The first interactional feature of teacher talk found in data was scaffolding. It happened in discussion activities.

Extract 4.1

T : "Can you find it in Indonesia?"

L6 : Yes, many in Indonesia. If you find the gold in the river, may be just not gold. Because the gold just in ((2)).

²⁰Richard Cullen. Teacher Talk and the Classroom Context. *English Language Teaching Journal* Vol. 25 No. 3, 179.

²¹Miles, Matthew B., Huberman, A. Michael, and Saldana, Johnny. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis* (3rd ed.). (London: SAGE Publications Inc, 2014), 33.

T : The gold in the river is not real.
Not really gold

L6 : Yes, not really gold. Because
there is contents the sulphur one.

Reformulation in this way can help the student to give answer more accurate indicated by his sentence "*The gold in the river is not real. Not really gold*". In response to this, L6 commented "yes, not really gold. Because there is content the sulphur one". This response indicated that teacher's scaffolding assisted the student in giving appropriate answer. When the student can give the response to the teacher means that this strategy can construct the learning opportunity. Therefore, pedagogic goal of the teacher in this moment was achieved.

The second strategy, extension, was performed by English teacher in classroom interaction. In extract 4.2 this strategy was illustrated.

Extract 4.2

T : Ok, siti masrifah, what kind of
clouds? How many?

Siti : =So many mr=

LL : Hahahaaa

T : That you got the information from
them, how many?

Siti : Ten sir,, cirrus, altostratus,
cumulus, cumulonimbus, eh...
stratus, cirrostratus,, ehh..

Extension in this situation was given by the teacher because he was not satisfied with student's answer. It was indicated in teacher's utterance such as: "*That you got information from them, how many?*" In response to teacher's question, a student named Siti produced short answer in the first question given by the teacher. However, she tried to give fuller explanation and mentioned the kind of clouds after the teacher extended her answer.

The last strategy of scaffolding, modelling, was illustrated in extract 4.3

Extract 4.3

L2 : And then the next topic is red for
all clear. That is so much I don't
know how sing it, the lyrics are...
a red sky at night is the
shepherd's delight, a red sky in
the morning is the shepherd's
warning. Eh... you know
shepherd?

T : =Shepherd

L2 : =Shepherd, it means is gembala.
And then ehm...when the sun is
low in the sky eh... morning or
evening it tends to glow red

anyway, yes like sunset or sunrise. Sunrise at morning...

T : =One twenty forth=
L15 : =One twenty forth.

The use of modeling in this time was effective way to provide an input for student in producing appropriate contribution. When the student can produce the correct form of pronunciation such as the word “shepherd” means that pedagogic goal was achieved by the teacher in this extract. In sum, the teacher succeeds in playing an important role in classroom interaction through scaffolding. Walsh stated that in using strategies of scaffolding, the teacher’s role is to shape the student’s contribution into something more acceptable.²²

Direct Repair

The second interactional feature found in classroom interaction was direct repair. In the following conversation, direct repair performed by English teacher was illustrated.

Extract 4.4

L15 :As the earth spins, the sun reaches its highest point in the sky at different times, an hour later for every satu per dua empat=

LL : hahahaha

It can be seen in transcript that the simple word and minimum time consuming was used by the teacher when correcting errors. According to Walsh (2002:11), there is certain logic in keeping error correction to a minimum in oral fluency practice activities in order to reduce interruption and maintain the flow of interaction.²³

Content Feedback

Extract 4.6 illustrated how content feedback performed by English teacher.

Extract 4.6

L6 : Yes, many in Indonesia. If you find the gold in the river, may be just not gold. Because the gold just in ((2)).

T : The gold in the river is not real. Not really gold

L6 : Yes, Not really gold. Because there is contents the sulphur one.

T : Ok, be careful. Don’t buy gold from the river... but the gold from java

LL : Hahahaaa

²²Walsh. *Investigating Classroom*. 120.

OKARA Journal of Languages and Literature, Vol. 1, Tahun 1, Mei 2016

²³ Walsh. “Construction or Obstruction: Teacher Talk and Learner Improvement in the EFL calssroom. *Language Teaching Research*”. 11.

In this extract, the student said that the gold in the river is not real gold. Because of this statement, the teacher gave a comment in form of caution indicated by his utterance: “*Ok, be careful. Don’t buy gold from the river... but the gold from java*”. This comment caused all students laughed and gave various expressions just for several seconds.

Feedback on message rather than its form is conducive to genuine communication and using humor in performing this feedback created fun learning to the learners. Teacher’s use of this interactional feature is appropriate with pedagogic goal; language use and pedagogic purpose coincide. As Walsh stated that where language use and pedagogic purpose coincide, learning opportunity is facilitated; conversely, where there is a significant deviation between language use and teaching goal, opportunities for learning are missed.²⁴

Extended Wait-Time

Extract 4.7

T : Ok, thank you everybody. No, no, you are still here. Now, I want to ask them. You! Ok. What is different between rock, stone and mineral?

L9 : (15) *Rock is under by stone...*
 L6 : No, no no...
 L9 : Stone under by rock=
 LL : =Hahahaa
 T : The quality
 L9 : Rock is under (4) rock is... The quality of stone under rock eh...the part of stone is mineral.

In extract above, the English teacher asked a student a question about the different between rock, stone and mineral. The student cannot answer directly because she still tried to find the answer from the text. Thus, the teacher let her to find it and waited for several seconds (indicated by mark (15) in transcript) to get the answer expected. He tried to give a clue such as the word “*the quality*” and gave more time for student to work out the answer by herself and this was what teacher really did in the class.

As seen in extracts above, the student could produce longer response after teacher provided wait time in that moment. It lend strong support to Walsh that the time allowed by the teacher to answer a question not only increases the number of learner response but also it frequently results in more complex

²⁴ Ibid. 5.

answers and leads to an increase in learner interaction.²⁵

Seeking Clarification

How the teacher performed this seeking clarification can be seen in the conversation below.

Extract 4.9

- L6 : Stone? This the hard one? And Rock? Rock is the common stone in the world. Rock there is eh... three, divided three. But stone, that's not stone. Stone there is... under the rock.
- T : You mean the quality?
- L6 : Yes, the quality.

In this conversation, L6 used vague utterance such as “stone under the rock”. This statement was not clear for the teacher so that he tried to clarify it by asking him a question like “*You mean the quality?*”. Hence, the English teacher used seeking clarification towards student's idea that was vague to understand to help him elaborate idea with more comprehensible utterance.

It was evidenced in extract that the teacher's unwillingness to accept the

student's first contribution can promote learner speech and help them to express more clear explanation. As Walsh stated that teachers who seeks clarification can maximize learning potential than those who do not.²⁶

Confirmation checks

The interactional feature dealing with confirmation check was also performed by English teacher in classroom interaction.

Extract 4.10

- T : Try to understand and then discuss with your friends. What does it mean what is it about, and then you make some notes, and then I want you to explain about the topic by using your own words, use your own words to explain about the topic. *Do you understand?*
- LL : Yes
- T : Ok?
- LL : Ok

It was found in extract above, the teacher attempted to confirm that all of information can be understood by the students. According to Walsh confirmation check is confirming understanding of the

²⁵Walsh. *Exploring Classroom Discourse*. 34.

²⁶Ibid. 34.

student's or teacher's contribution.²⁷ Confirmation check is marked by question like: is that clear? Do you understand? Have you got that? Or does everyone know what to do?

In this case, confirmation checks were very important to help the teacher in getting student's understanding about what he has conveyed in the classroom. It was important to know that there was not any unclear explanation for the students so that the teacher can continue the activity to the next activity.

Teacher Echo

This feature was performed by the teacher in the opening when he started the class by giving some information about TOEFL program. It can be seen in conversation below.

Extract 4.11

- T : (3) the TOEFL score for *four hundred and fifty until five hundred* at least ok? *Four hundred and fifty until five hundred, ok?*
- L1 : Ok

In this conversation, the teacher tried to restate his previous utterance to underline and emphasize his statement. This repetition was used because he wanted to underline and emphasize to the students for the purpose they can hear clearly what score that they have to get. It was indicated by italicized sentence in transcript such as "the TOEFL score for *four hundred and fifty until five hundred* at least ok? *Four hundred and fifty until five hundred, ok*".

The use of repetition and different intonation his previous utterance was beneficial occupied by the teacher to underline the information so that the student can hear and catch the information clearly. The teacher achieved the goal because the students can understand the sentence and catch the information clearly so that there is not any question from the students about it.

Teacher Interruption

Extract 4.13

- L4 : Sapphire is eh=
- T : =Can you get a picture of sapphire? Yeah, please go on
- L4 :Sapphire is eh... same with diamond is the hardest stone, it's not just...

²⁷Steve Walsh. *Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action*. 203.

It can be seen that the student want to explain about sapphire but suddenly the teacher interrupted his talk. Actually the teacher asked another student beside him who brought the tablet and showed the picture of stones indicated by his utterance “*can you get a picture of sapphire?*”. However, the teacher was aware of his interruption would breakdown student’s explanation so he pleased the student to continue his explanation by saying “*yeah, please go on*”.

In this case, teacher interruption is unhelpful for the student. It means that the teacher did not achieve any pedagogic goal in this moment. It was suggested that the teacher should reduce interruption because it would be a pause of learner’s explanation as Walsh stated that interruption causes the learner to lose the thread of what he was saying. So, it was good if the teacher can delay his question for a very short time until the student finished his utterance.²⁸

Extended Teacher Turn

This feature was illustrated in extract 4.14.

Extract 4.14

LL : Amazing/ amazing

²⁸Steve Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. 67.

T : All right, the first start in the class, I’d like to inform you with the program that we are going to do. Ok, I have discussed with the... I have et the people from eh... the course about TOEFL Planning that we are going to do.

The teacher used a long explanation to share information in the classroom in this conversation. The using transitional mark like “all right” and “ok” in his utterance was used to refer the student to information conveyed.

The use of this feature pedagogically was to transmit the information for the students. In this case, extended teacher turn was important point in teaching learning process because the teacher played important role in the classroom. The transitional marker like “all right” and “ok” was always used by the teacher to refer the student into information to the next information.

Extended Learner Turn

Promoting extended learner turn was a way to give the students space for learning to participate in learning. Thus, this feature can enhance student’s ability in learning. It was illustrated in conversation below.

Extract 4.16

L14 : Ok my friends, ok now try to listen me, and try to understand what I

say. I will told you about imperial jealousy. You know jealousy?

- LL : No
L14 : That's from word jealous
L15 : Cemburu
L14 : Nah=
LL : =Hahahaha
L14 : Ok the month of August. August is=

In this extract, the teacher gave interactional space for the student in expressing themselves without involvement from the teacher. It was indicated by a long utterance of L14 such as "*Ok my friends, ok now try to listen to me, and try to understand what I say. I will told you about imperial jealousy. You know jealousy?*". It can be seen that L14 has controlled the topic and is able to produce relatively long turn.

By giving tasks in this activity, the teacher obeyed traditional type of classroom discourse in which the teacher generally dominates the class talk and students have fewer opportunities to ask their own questions or generate subtopics. It was evidenced that a contemporary views of learning and their pedagogical applications have begun to change traditional classroom interaction patterns, shaping the communicative roles of teacher and students as participants in a classroom community.

OKARA Journal of Languages and Literature, Vol. 1, Tahun 1, Mei 2016

Display Question

Extract 4.16 illustrated how this feature was performed by the teacher in classroom.

Extract 4.16

- T : No? Now I ask you question.
Hm... there is vina? They explain about hot dog days. Do you know what does it mean?
Vina : (6) eh... the hottest days
T : Hottest day. Why did it called hot dog? Why is it called dog days?
Vina : (5) from roman people
T : And then?
Vina : The brightest star is Sirius the dog
T : Oh, the name of the star is Sirius the dog so that's why it called the hot dog days. Ok, good.. next Novita, What is acid rain?
Novita : (6) acid rain is... rain is acid=
LL : =hahahaa
T : Why?

From student's response in extract above, it can be seen that the student can understand the material and give short answer. By using display question, the teacher could know what students understand so the topic in the next

session can be planned to meet student's need.

However, in this case the student's response was simple and short. If the teacher did not extend them, the answers would not be satisfying. This result lent strong support to Walsh.²⁹ Walsh stated that display question typically produces shorter answer or simpler responses from learners. Therefore it was suggested that it was important if the teacher also use referential question. Because referential question not only promote discussion but also help learners improve oral fluency.³⁰

There were three features of teacher talk which were not performed by the teacher. They were referential question, turn completion and form-focused feedback. Referential question was not used by the teacher because the activity conducted in the class was discussion about reading text so that the teacher commonly used display question to elicit student's understanding about material. Furthermore, data gained from interview showed that the teacher wanted to give more interactional space for the students in expressing themselves through student-centered activity. The teacher's concern focused on student's

oral fluency rather than accuracy. That's why form-focused feedback and turn completion were not performed in classroom interaction.

Conclusion

From thorough elaboration and discussion upon the data on the fourth chapter, it could be concluded that the teacher performs eleven interactional features in classroom interaction out of fourteen. The eleven features are: scaffolding, direct repair, content feedback, extended wait time, seeking clarification, confirmation checks, teacher echo, teacher interruption, extended teacher turn, extended learner turn and display question. Related to pedagogic goal, only teacher interruption does not have any clear function for the student. Thus, the teacher does not achieve any pedagogic goal of the moment.

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²⁹Walsh. *Investigating Classroom Discourse*. 9.

³⁰Walsh. *Exploring Classroom Discourse*. 12.

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