Analyzing Teacher Discourse: Understanding the Role of Teacher Talk in ESL Classroom Communication

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Abstract

The teacher's role in the ESL classroom is pivotal in acquiring knowledge and language skills by students learning a second language. This study aims to investigate the functions of teacher talk in an ESL classroom setting, focusing on Indonesian teachers and learners. The research utilizes discourse analysis methodology to analyze videos of actual classroom observations of English classes, transcribe the interactions, code them, and conduct a detailed analysis. The data for this study is collected through recording and transcribing ESL classroom sessions conducted by Indonesian teachers. The videos are analyzed using discourse analysis techniques to identify and categorize the various functions of teacher talk, including explaining, creating, prompting, and dialogue. These functions delve into facilitating language learning and communication skills among ESL learners in Indonesia. The study revealed that Indonesian teachers predominantly employed explaining, creating, prompting, and dialogue in their classroom discourse. Through explanations, teachers clarified topics, words, and commands while creating involved paraphrasing and facilitating student understanding. Prompting elicits interaction through the initiation-response-feedback pattern, and dialogue facilitates spontaneous exchanges of conversation, ideas, and experiences between teachers and students. The identified functions of teacher talk shed light on the strategies employed by Indonesian teachers to support English language acquisition in ESL classrooms. By understanding these functions and their impact on language learning, educators can enhance their teaching practices to aid comprehension and linguistic development. This study contributes to the existing knowledge based on effective teacher talk in an ESL setting.

Keywords: applied linguistics, Philippines, teacher talk, English as a second language (ESL), ESL classroom, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Teacher communication plays a crucial role in classroom dynamics by assisting students in comprehending learning materials and encouraging active participation during educational activities (Nasir, Yusuf, & Wardana, 2019). In English classes, teacher-student interactions in English are essential for fostering the students' intrinsic motivation and understanding of the importance of mastering the English language (Hashim & Yunus, 2018).

Effective teacher communication extends beyond mere exchange of information; it cultivates student engagement, critical thinking, and language proficiency. Maintaining a high standard of verbal interaction is essential for fostering meaningful dialogue between educators and learners, preventing the classroom from becoming passive and teacher-centered (Jing & Jing, 2018). Through various communicative activities like

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lecturing, questioning, explaining, and giving instructions, teachers facilitate effective student communication in diverse classroom interactions.

Nunan (1991) emphasizes the critical role of teacher talk not only in classroom management but also in the language acquisition process. Effective language use is vital for classroom organization and implementation of teaching strategies. The quality of teacher talk is a crucial factor that influences the success or failure of classroom instruction. Therefore, clear and accurate speech is paramount for teachers to ensure effective communication and comprehension (Nurpahmi, 2017).

Forman (2012) identified the functions of teacher talk in the ESL classroom as animating, translating, creating, prompting, and dialoguing. Animating involves the teacher verbally presenting written English to help students hear how L2 sounds, especially in low-tech settings. Translating occurs when the teacher translates L2 words or phrases into L1. Explaining can be in L1 or L2, offering metalinguistic information about grammar, meaning, usage, or L2 culture, and giving instructions. Creating involves using L2 for meaning-based communication, focusing on strategies like paraphrasing, exemplification, personalization, and localization. Lastly, prompting and dialoguing involve the teacher engaging students in whole-class responses.

The literature highlights the crucial role of teacher talk in enhancing student learning through effective communication. Hattie and Yates (2022) stress the importance of clear explanation strategies for student understanding, especially in complex subjects, enabling students to grasp challenging concepts and apply them in problem-solving. Nguyen and Karpicke (2021) emphasize how teacher talk can foster problem-solving skills and creativity by providing examples, relatable concepts, and personalized interactions, encouraging critical and innovative thinking. Li and Xie (2023) underscore the significance of teacher prompts in enriching student learning and developing metacognitive skills through strategic dialogue, stimulating cognitive processes and prompting thoughtful responses. Teachers' dialogue creates a dynamic learning environment for interactive exchanges, fostering student participation, collaborative learning experiences, and academic growth.

Despite the extensive research on teacher communication, a notable gap exists in the literature concerning teacher talk in the second language learning process between Filipino and Indonesian students. While existing studies on teacher communication have predominantly focused on Western or English-speaking educational environments, there is a lack of detailed qualitative exploration into the functions of teacher talk within the Asian educational context. This gap in the literature underscores the need for further investigation to recommend enhancements in teacher communication through professional development initiatives, including communication skills training for educators to amplify their effectiveness in the instructional setting.

This study seeks to investigate the functions of teacher communication in ESL classrooms, drawing upon Forman's (2012) theory that identifies six functions of teacher talk: animating, translating, explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing. Classroom conversation holds particular significance in language education (Cook, 2000), with numerous scholars noting that teacher talk constitutes approximately 70% of classroom discourse (Cook, 2000; Chaudron, 1988). The educators convey knowledge and skills, structure teaching activities, and assist students in practice. Generally, verbal communication serves as both the focus of instruction and the means to attain educational objectives, facilitating the organization of the classroom and the fulfillment of teaching goals.

2. Method

This study utilized a qualitative method, particularly a discourse analysis approach to analyze the functions of talk and text within social interaction. Linguistic corpora emphasize the teacher's and students' communication using their discursive practices (Wiggins, 2009).

2.1. Materials and Instruments

The researcher used audio recordings of real-time ESL classroom lessons to capture and analyze the dynamic interactions between teachers and learners during English language sessions. These recordings served as the primary source for conducting discourse analysis. The Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology focused on uncovering the natural interaction patterns inherent in the data. This approach prioritized observing the emergent interaction dynamics rather than being swayed by preconceived assumptions that language teachers might hold about the data (Walsh, 2002).

2.2. Design and Procedure

The study utilized Conversational Analysis as an approach to discourse analysis (Delve & Limpaecher, 2023). The data was collected from natural interactions between teachers and learners during ESL classes. Conversational Analysis requires that the exchanges take place independently of the investigator's need to record and analyze them (Pallotti, 2007). Multiple ESL classes conducted by Indonesian teachers with diverse groups of learners were recorded, capturing various activities and interactions during language lessons. After the observation, transcription and coding took place. The recorded classroom observations were transcribed verbatim to accurately represent teacher talk and student interactions. The transcripts were then coded based on the functions of teacher talk identified in the literature, such as animating, translating, explaining, prompting, and dialoguing. The analyzed data aimed to understand the patterns and strategies employed by teachers in utilizing different functions of teacher talk to facilitate language acquisition among ESL learners. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed.

Data triangulation was considered in this study to avoid researcher bias. A variety of data sources, including time, space, and persons, were observed. Data sources included class observation, field notes, and audio recordings from different ESL classrooms by different Indonesian teachers. Findings were corroborated, compensating for any weaknesses with the strengths of other data, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the results (Rugg, 2010).

Each observation represented different data of the same event, discovering commonalities within dissimilar settings. Furthermore, the observations took place at different times to observe ongoing interactions (Denzin, 2009; cited by Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018).

3. Results and Discussion

This section provides the results and discussion of findings based from the extracts of the classroom observation of the three ESL professors using the conversation analysis.

3.1. Functions of Teacher Talk in an ESL Classroom

Among the six functions of teacher talk posited by Forman (2012), the predominant functions of teacher talk involve explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing. The table below summarizes these functions prevalent in English classes of Indonesian teachers.

Table 1. Functions of Teacher Talk in an ESL Classroom

Functions	Sample Extracts
Explaining	In news report is a factual. You know fact, factual. It is a fact, something that's true. And concise, as well as informative form of writing.
	This symbol here means you can use your gesture to communicate from another people to another country. If you have found the barriers with your friends from another countries, you can use gesture.
Creating	T: This example here it is, you can use body gesture… what else?
	S: face expression.
	T: Facial expression. For example, if you don't understand. Okay? They will get what the point that you will tell to your friend.
	T: If you only use simple sentences,in your case,you are like driving a motorbike in one gear, right? If you can imagine, right, you are in one gear or one bike in the motorbike. Does it go smoothly?
	S: No (in chorus).
Prompting	T: What information can you get from the first paragraph?
	S: Solar energy.
	T: Anyone else? Do you have any other idea? So, this is talking about what?
	S1: About solar technology.
	T: What the message that you get? What do you think about this video?
	S: Ok maybe like on the meals, the meals. They have the tools to eat some meals.
	T: The meals?
	S: the meals and the tools to eat some meals. Meals like the chops and then different culture maybe like use knife and fork.
Dialoguing	T: Do you have any trouble communicating? When you communicate with another country?
	S: The accent. When we speak the English language.
	T: What effect does flood give to our life, to the environment?
	S: Lose your place to stay
	T: Loss. Some people have to go to other places.
	S: Yeah.Loss of stay.

Providing explanations can be done by explaining what a concept is and explaining what to do. In explaining what a concept is, the teacher offers metalinguistic details related to the sounds, grammar, meaning, usage, or cultural aspects of the second language to clarify the essence of it. In explaining what to do, the teacher provides classroom directives or instructions.

3.1.1. Explaining What Is

Delving into the meaning and usage of words and expressions provides students with a holistic view of how language functions in different contexts. By exploring the semantics of the second language, the teacher elucidates not just the literal definitions of words but also their nuances and appropriate usage in various situations. This deepens students' semantic awareness and helps them develop a more nuanced understanding of the language's subtleties.

ESL Class 1

Extract 1: In news report is a factual. You know fact, **factual**. It is a fact, something that's true. And concise, as well as informative form of writing.

Extract 2: Here, headline should be brief, you know brief? Brief is something that you have to tell the news in a **brief**, like *you don't have to tell those kind of words that are useless*.

Extract 3: Okay, just make it clear, the news. Just make the news clear, as clear as you can. Brief and reflecting of the core news. You know the **core news**? The core, what is *the exact news that you want to convey to the readers*.

The teacher attempted to explain the meaning of the word by providing definitions and explanations. "Factual" was defined as something that is true, "brief" as not using unnecessary words, and "core" as the exact point being conveyed to the readers. The teacher aimed to simplify the terms so that students could better understand the topic.

ESL Class 2

Extract 4: Intercultural communication is the process of **using** symbols receiving information from the **sender and receiver**. The communication is the process of **transmitting** symbols between individuals. When **you** communicate with another **people** from another country, you can communicate not only with the word but you can also communicate with the sign. We can use to communicate with other people with another country? For communication. What is the example? Do you know it?

Extract 5: I will make it clear. So this symbol here **means** you can use your gesture, body gesture to communicate from another people to another country. If you have found the barriers are the problems

with your friends from another countries, you can use like your body gesture.

In the second class, the teacher explained intercultural communication by modifying the statement or word to thoroughly explain an idea. Here, the teacher changed the phrase "using symbols from the sender to the receiver" to "transmitting symbols between individuals". She also elaborated on the meaning of sender and receiver by giving a scenario in which a person (sender) communicates with people (receiver) from another country. To deepen her explanation, she asked the students to provide examples to check whether they understood the explanation.

ESL Class 3

> *Extract 6*: The hot weather is because of the condition, because you sang outside. That is not logical right? So this is what it means by **logical** in terms of sentences, but later also in terms of paragraphs. Where you have to place the paragraphs? You place the paragraphs of causes first of after the effect? Do you think you discuss the causes first or do you think you can discuss the effects first?
> S:Causes
> T: That is also logical order. So logical order is not about the sentence organization but also paragraph organizations.

Here, the word "logical" was emphasized. The teacher provided sentence examples and let the students determine what comes first and what comes next to understand the term. He initiated some questions to stir the minds of the learners of what is logical and not.

3.1.2. Explaining What to Do

Indonesian teachers demonstrated their authority in the classroom by giving clear and direct instructions and using imperatives to ensure students' attention and cooperation.

ESL Class 1

> *Extract 7:* **Louder** please, I can't hear your voice.
> Okay.Let's **take a look** at this. This text, we have headline.
> **Attention** please. This is headline.
>
> *Extract 8*: I want you to **come forward** here and **draw** the Wh-question and your conclusion. Come on, tell us.
> Now, who wants to come forward to give us the full information about the Wh-question? **Don't be shy. Don't be afraid.**
>
> *Extract 9:* **Come** here please. Don't be afraid to commit mistakes. Common, come here and tell us the whole information about these?
> Okay. **Tell** us about information about this news.

Professor Si guided the students to focus on the text, checking their understanding by instructing them to formulate a Wh-question based on the news. Additionally, she fostered a supportive environment by encouraging active discussions and the sharing of ideas among the students.

ESL Class 2

> Extract 10: Before we discuss more detail about that, **please watch** the video. This is type of silent reading and then you should interpret what the message of this video and then we will continue to discuss the topic.

Professor Mu showed a video to the students, comparing and contrasting the practices, preferences, and attitudes of people from different countries in terms of intercultural communication. She used a polite tone by using the word "please" when instructing the students to watch the video, which made her communication less authoritative and more positive.

Hattie and Yates (2022) reinforced effective explanation strategies because they impact student learning outcomes and understanding of complex topics. One of the primary functions of teacher talk is to explain concepts, processes, or procedures to students. Clear explanations help students grasp the content more effectively and apply it to solve problems or complete tasks.

3.2. Creating

It involves rephrasing, illustrating, personalizing, and localizing content. This creative process can be achieved through semantics, grammar, and non-verbal forms of communication such as gestures or images. It is important to take into account learners' existing knowledge when making semantic choices.

ESL Class 2

> Extract 11: This example here it is, you can use body gesture. What else?
> S: Face expression.
> T: Facial expression. For example, if you don't understand. Okay? Do you get it? They will get what the point that you will tell to your friend. Okay? Intercultural happens when you communicate with another people from another background. Let's say if you have a friend from Indonesia, and if you are from Indonesia, then you. Is that intercultural communication?
> S: No.
> T: Your friend is from another country.

Professor Mu used exemplification to elaborate on the topic. By drawing on the students' knowledge, she asked them to share examples to simplify the concept of intercultural communication. In the conversation, the teacher made it clear that communication between two Indonesians does not constitute intercultural communication.

ESL Class 3

> Extract 12: If you only use simple sentences,in your case,you are **like** driving a motorbike in one gear, right? If you can imagine, right, you are in one gear or one bike in the motorbike. Does it go smoothly?
> S: No (in chorus).
> T:It doesn't go smoothly,but you got to use compound sentence and complex sentence or compounding, complex to make the essay go smoothly.

In this part, exemplification and simplification are evident. The teacher used an analogy to compare sentence structure to a motorbike's gears. The students could relate to the analogy, as seen in their reactions and responses. The teacher leveraged the students' existing knowledge about motorbike gears to help them understand the importance of sentence structure in achieving a smooth flow.

This is in consonance with the research of Nguyen and Karpicke (2021) wherein they posited that teacher talk create opportunities for students to engage in problem-solving and creative thinking activities. Teacher talk utilizes examples, familiar concepts, and knowledge of the students to create meaningful learning experiences

3.3. Prompting

In the context of classroom instruction, involves eliciting responses from students in a language-oriented manner by providing simple cues that guide learners through the learning process. This approach is often used to actively engage students in the learning process and promote language development.

ESL Class 1

> *Extract 13*: In headline, can you imagine what the news is about from the title itself?
> S: It's about solar technology.
> T: What can you get from this clip? What information can you get from the first paragraph?
> S: Solar energy.
> T: Anyone else? Do you have any other idea? So this is talking about what?
> S1: About solar technology.
>
> *Extract 14*: The second one we have the Body, right.? And the one which tells the full of the news is from the Body. Can you please mention the Wh-question from this? Can you find the Wh-question?
> S: Yes.
> T: So what is it about? xxx who is giving the information itself?
> S: Anderson?
> T: In this part?
> S: Joan Anderson…..

There was a clear pattern in the conversation: the teacher initiated the discussion, the student responded, and then the teacher provided feedback eliciting responses through proper questioning techniques.

ESL Class 2

Extract 15: So, what's the message that you get from this video about the cross-cultural understanding? Anyone? Do you want to answer?
S: I think this video explains about the difference culture about the Western and the Islam.
T: About the Western?
S: Western.
T: I see, I see. About the Western. About the table manner.

Extract 16: What the message that you get? What do you think about this video?
S: Okay maybe like on the meals, the meals. They have the tools to eat some meals.
T: The meals?
S: the meals and the tools to eat some meals. Meals like the chops and then different culture maybe like use knife and fork.
T: Like the different culture to using the tools of table manner.

The teacher started the interaction by asking a question and giving a cue to prompt students to respond. This phase sets the stage for student engagement and participation. Asking the students for their thoughts opened up a spontaneous and open conversation with them.

ESL Class 3

Extract 17: But why is cause and effect essay? Why is this essay called cause and effect essay? What is this essay all about? Anybody else?
S: The result is the effect.
T: Okay. It's consequence. Something has a consequence. That is effect. Right? Here is a, the result is. Has causes, has effects.

Extract 18: Which is the cause and which is the effect?If I say the weather,it was hot last night and then I went outside. Which is the cause? Which one is the cause?
S: The weather.
T: And which one was the effect?
S: went outside
T: Because…
S: the weather was hot last night.

The teacher used observable prompting questions to engage the students, asking a question, rephrasing it, and providing a follow-up question. The students responded succinctly, and the teacher linked their answer to his next question.

Li and Xie (2023) affirmed that teacher prompts are effective in facilitating student learning and enhancing metacognitive skills. Teachers often use prompts in their talk to stimulate student thinking, encourage reflection, and prompt responses. Prompting can be in the form of questions, cues, or prompts that guide students towards deeper understanding and application of knowledge.

3.4. Dialoguing

It involves students sharing their perspectives and engaging in meaningful exchanges of ideas. This activity sparks a dialogic communication where students expressed their thoughts in the second language (L2), leading to a dynamic interaction where the teacher actively built on and responded to the answers of the students.

ESL Class 2

Extract 19: Do you have any trouble in communicating? Do you have a problem when you communicate with another country?
S: The accent. When we speak the English language.
T: Okay. About the accent. That's the problem. How about you?
S: We have the different accent. In the Ph, we can say, they say like "communication", they say "komunikasyon". For me, it's not easy to understand what they say.
T:That's the big problem. Accent and/or do you think pronunciation? Why do you think the problem?
S: Because we from the other country and another background. That's why we have different pronunciation and background.
T: How do you deal with it? When you face that problem?
S: Not fast . Not fast.
T: Ahh, not fast. Maybe you can, can you say it again? Pardon? Please? What?
S: Yes Miss.

Extract 20: Do you get the culture shock? Do you get the culture shock when…What's the culture shock that you… Do you have culture shock when you're in Philippines?
S1: They have no spicy food. They don't like a spicy food.
S2: For me, when I go to the Philippines. Public transportation. We don't have a money coin. We have wallet when I go to the Philippines.

The teacher engaged in meaningful two-way communication with the students, creating opportunities for dialogue and interaction. This involved a reciprocal exchange of experiences and ideas between the teacher and students, fostering a collaborative learning environment. For example, a student shared that he had difficulty understanding the accent, so he asked the speaker to not speak fast. The teacher also shared her experience, mentioning that a coin was used in the Philippines but not in Indonesia.

ESL Class 3

Extract 21: What causes this flood?
S: Rainfall.
S: Bad drainage.
S: There is no irrigation of water .
S: Location.
T: What else?
S: Bad habits.
T: Habits.
T: What kind of habits? Who mentioned rainfall? You have bad drainage, location is lower. So you can make cause. The increase in the amount of rainfall- the first cause. The second cause. The third cause. These three things are the causes of floods. Now, what effect does flood give to, to, to our life, to the environment?
S: Lose your place to stay.

In this instance, the professor utilized a questioning technique to elicit responses from the students. He requested additional examples, more ideas, and increased participation from students who spoke less. Through dialogue, the teacher fostered interaction that encouraged students to contribute to discussions, contemplate their learning, and collectively build knowledge.

This is agreed by Yin and Sun (2022) who found out that dialogic teacher talk is important in promoting student engagement, critical thinking, and language development. Dialoguing promotes interactive exchange of ideas, opinions, and feedback between teachers and students. Further, dialogue allows for meaningful communication, active listening, and collaborative learning experiences.

Conclusion

The study concluded that out of the six functions of teacher talk (animating, translating, explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing), four functions were observed: explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing. The use of technology has become essential for teachers to improve students' English language skills, leading to a decrease in the use of animating and translating by Indonesian teachers.

Implication for Practice

Further research can investigate the impact of technology integration on the prominence of certain functions of teacher talk in ESL classrooms. This could help in understanding how digital tools influence language teaching practices. Also, conducting comparative studies across different cultural and educational contexts can provide insights into the variations in the utilization of explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing strategies in English language teaching.

It also implies that the Language Program adapt a seminar-workshop or teacher talk programs that focus on enhancing the teachers' skills in explaining complex concepts, fostering creativity, utilizing effective prompting techniques, and promoting meaningful dialogues in the classroom. By this, more student-centered

approaches can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of explaining, creating, prompting, and dialoguing functions in ESL classrooms.

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