

TEACHER TALK AND INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE CHOICE: TWO PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

When we agree that a foreign language acquisition centered in the classroom, teacher talk plays the most important role in achieving the success of teaching and learning. However, a high intensity of teacher talk and the vacillation of instructional language choice become two common problems are usually faced. Therefore, it seems important to present a variety of literature reviews to be considered by teachers that may be used as the reference to solve the problem. This study presented the concept of teacher talk at classroom interaction, monolingual and bilingual approach in EFL classroom and some previous research findings: the rationales for supporting bilingual approach, which were gained from some articles. This literature study suggests that teachers have to control the quantity and quality of their talk to gain an effective teaching and learning process in the EFL classroom. It is more advantageous to reduce Teacher Talk Time and increase Student Talk Time based on the students' need because too much teacher talk will have an impact on decreased student learning motivation. When teaching EFL students, it will be helpful for overcoming cognitive difficulties if teachers insert mother tongue for the certain condition such as to translate difficult words from reading the text and to explain grammar. However, the teachers have to keep a principled and judicious use of mother tongue because a very high proportion of it also limits the students' achievement. If the students are exposed more to the second language, they will become more successful

Keywords: *Teacher Talk, Foreign Language Acquisition, Literature Review, Monolingual Approach, Bilingual Approach*

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language acquisition is one of the greatest concerns in this era in which people learn other languages, especially English, for their various personal goals such as traveling abroad, getting better jobs, passing the examination, continuing higher education, etc. In recent years, in its position as the International language, mastery English is not only interesting. However, it becomes a necessity and every state's demands for the citizens of the country. Therefore, English is used as one of the compulsory curricula at schools and step by step, Jenkins (2012, p.486) reveals that ELF has grown from a minority interest within applied linguistics to a major field of study in its own right. In addition, most recently, attention has turned to its implications for the ELT classroom.



In Indonesia, English has been taught at the school since the Dutch colonial era but it was abolished during the Japanese colonial era. Then English was officially re-taught as a foreign language in Indonesian schools along with the Minister of Education and Culture decree in 1967. For some countries in the world whose citizens are not the native speaker of English, English functions as the second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) where the culture and mother tongue is different. However, English as Foreign Language (EFL) and Second Language (ESL) are seen as to have a different meaning in the learning context and its use. EFL is envisioned as classroom study in a foreign where English does not play much of a role internally, while ESL is frequently understood as referring to the acquisition of English as an additional language in a setting where it is the dominant mode of communication (Richards and Smidt, 2010).

Absolutely, the acquisition of English in all EFL countries centred at classroom including Indonesia. Therefore, the English language acquisition at classes is expected to run optimally so the students can easily master the target language and the learning objectives can be achieved. Stern (1983 p. 400) asserts if the second language is learned as a foreign language in a language class in a non-supportive environment, like in Indonesia, instruction (teacher talk) is likely to be the major or even the only source of target language input (as cited in Setiawati, 2012, p.35).

However, the expectation is not always in line with the reality. Two specific issues regarding teacher talk in EFL classroom commonly arise. Most teachers in Indonesia who still adopt the traditional teaching systems stand in front of the class and apply the lecture methods on students in which the teacher uses the power of teacher talk to dominate the classroom talk. The activities in the class look monotonous and boring. The flow of the activities based on teacher initiation, students response and teacher follow-up as Setiawati (2012) in her research study finds 80% of the talk in the class is dominated by teacher talk. The second issue is related to the instructional (teacher talk) language choice by EFL teacher (Indonesia). Should EFL teachers only speak target language in classes



while making the best of gestures, facial expressions, good eye contact to make students understand the meaning well? Alternatively, should they use their first language in explaining new grammar rules or conveying the important information? If the EFL teachers decide to use mother tongue, then how much the proportion of this language is enough to accommodate the students' English language acquisition?

The two issues above become problems that can hinder the development of English in Indonesia. Therefore, the researcher intends to present a variety of literature reviews to be considered by teachers and scholars that may be used as a reference for problem solving.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type of Research

This is a literature review research study. A literature review is a comprehensive summary of previous research on a topic that includes the concepts, theories, and findings as a foundation to support the researcher contribution. The purpose of this literature review is to create a viewpoint and give the whole understanding of the developments related to the field of this study. This landscape also signs that the author has indeed assimilated the majority of previous significant works in the field into her research study.

Source of Data

The literature review surveys some literature relevant to a particular area of research such as scholarly articles, books, and other sources. The researcher reviews the literature article started by describing two problems encountered in EFL classroom, then the researcher presented the concept of teacher talk at classroom interaction, monolingual and bilingual approach in EFL classroom and the researcher presents some previous research findings: the rationales for supporting bilingual approach.

Data Analysis

After describing the problem and framing a research question, the researcher searched and collected relevant bodies of literature, read the whole



literature, coded the data, the researcher combined some theories, summarized and synthesized the arguments and ideas of previous researchers, and managed results. The conclusions were presented to be the consideration for educational practitioners related to the judicious of teacher talk and it may become one of the ways to solve some problems related to issue of teacher talk.

DISCUSSION

Teacher Talk at Classroom Interaction

The internalization of a foreign language acquisition centred in the classroom which has its own features and special characteristics of the most important thing; classroom interaction between teacher and the students and also interaction among students. Yanfen and Yuqin (2010) highlight in a classroom interaction, teacher and students experience the exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas, between two or more people in a collaborative manner. Through interaction with the teacher, students can learn a lot, improve their language store and so, enlarge their knowledge of the language as much as possible. The statement clearly shows that there are two kinds of activities in the classroom interaction namely teacher talk and student talk.

Teachers greet students, explain the subject matter, give examples, instructions, and questions to students, and then, students respond to what the teacher instruct. Both teacher and student talk are very important. However, the existence and the proportion of student talk really depends on how the teachers control their talk in class as İnceçay (2010, p. 277) highlight “There is no learning without teaching. So as a tool of implementing teaching plans and achieving teaching goals, teacher talk plays an important role in language”.

The important information should be investigated is how much the effect of teacher talk variation in EFL classrooms on learners’ performance. Matsumoto (2010, p.54) informs that scholars and researchers identify teacher talk began approximately in the early-mid 1980s. Teacher talk has the significant influence on language acquisition in classroom interaction and it plays an important role in determining the success or failure of teaching and learning. Krashen and Terrell



(cited in Matsumoto: 2010, p. 55) also reveal, “Most importantly, that teacher talk is a vital source of comprehensible input in the second language classroom”. Through teacher talk, the students can be motivated more because, according to Setiawati (2012), it is an effective way of scaffolding young learners to improve their skill in the target language.

Teacher Talk can provide different influences towards the students such as teacher’s positive feedback can create a closeness and more comprehensible, referential questions can increase student’s critical thinking and train them to be more creative in solving the problem, let the students speak first then giving error correction make the students feel respected and encourage them to be more autonomous learners, etc.

Nevertheless, one of the common problems in classroom interaction is when a major portion of class time is dominated by the teacher talk. Setiawati (2012) finds there were some gaps between the students’ expectation and preference and the teachers’ perception of what the students want at classrooms, which make them feel less enthusiastic in learning the target language. Some teachers believe that the lesson must be full of their talk, explaining and delivering all knowledge to students, which shows that 80% of the talk in the class is dominated by teacher talk. While, according to her many researchers have proved that the fewer teachers talk and the more students talk, the result will be better. On the contrary, too much teacher talk will have an impact on decreased student learning motivation.

Setiawati (2012) states that despite the teacher talk’s capability to be a good model for young learners, most students found the class more motivating, interesting, and challenging when the teachers minimized their teacher talk and made use not only more constructive teacher talk but also interesting activities. Rezaee & Faharian (2012) also explains that when teaching the students, a teacher has to know teacher talk can have much more varied roles than merely passing time. They can be even attention gaining at times for what a teacher intends to convey or what he wants to teach. The teacher has to provide the opportunity for students to be more active in speaking in the classroom when asking the materials



that have not been understood, express opinions or respond to the task that is given by the teacher. Walsh (2002) as cited in Maftoon & Shakouri (2012, p.1212) examines that maximizing learners involvement seems to be beneficial for second/ foreign language acquisition. Thus, the teacher should be able to control the class through his/ her teacher talk”.

The other problem arises related to the judicious use of teacher talk in EFL classroom is the controversy about teacher’s instructional language in EFL classroom. Matsumoto (2010) reports that “teacher talk,” the language of instruction that second language teachers use to speak to their non-native speaker students in the classroom, has been one of the most hotly debated topics among many second language teachers and researchers for over two decades. Myojin (2007) completely explains there is little discussion on the issue of whether instructors’ use of their learners’ mother tongue in EFL classrooms would be more efficient and helpful for the learners’ English acquisition or whether an English-only teaching instruction would be more beneficial in EFL classrooms.

Teacher talk related to the instructional language choice at EFL classroom is also crucial factor to determine students’ success or failure in target language because teachers construct or obstruct learner participation in classroom interaction through their choice of language. In addition, of course, the decision of the instructional and interactional language used is not only applicable to teacher-students' interaction but also the classroom interaction among the students.

Monolingual and Bilingual Approach in EFL Classroom

A great question that arises when discussing the instructional language use in EFL classes is "whether the use of English only should be maintained by teacher at EFL classroom interaction or teacher guides students by combining both languages of L1 and L2, especially in countries where most of the population is indigenous citizens who speak a common national language such as Indonesia. If there is a code switching, how much the proportion of target language and the mother tongue used and what the influence of the interactional language used to the students' performance.



Mother tongue refers to a language learned before any other language has been learned in which a child learns mother tongue or first language automatically and naturally where he/she acquires it from the family, neighbor, other speakers and social environment around him/ her because mother tongue is first appeared and learned at home during childhood (Khati, 2011, p.42). In fact, in the process of a foreign language acquisition, teacher and the students are closely connected from the influence of the mother tongue, regardless from the controversy of the use of the mother tongue itself. Although it is not used in English class, the foreign accents of both non-native English speakers will be strongly influenced by their mother tongue when speaking. As an example, when Indonesian people speak English, their English sounds Indonesia.

According to Harbord (1992), the idea of prohibiting the students' mother tongue in EFL teaching goes back to around the turn of the century in which English language teaching became a casual career for young people visiting from Europe to EFL/ESL countries (as cited in Tsukatomo, 2012, p.146). In addition, Voicu (2012, p.213) reports that the argumentation of "learners acquire foreign languages following basically the same path they acquire their mother tongue" being one of the strongest bases to avoid the using of mother tongue in the EFL class. These encouraged the teachers to guide students to speak English only in classroom interaction as a necessity.

Tsukatomo (2012) shares Auerbach's ideas (1993, p. 5) who supports the idea of the reason for using the English only at classroom interaction is that the more students are exposed to target language, the more quickly they will learn because they hear and use English, they will internalize it to begin to think in English in which the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it. Mahmutoğlu & Kıcı (2013) also share Jones' quotation (2010: 8) "the learners' L2 proficiency will improve, as will the learners' confidence in using the L2. If the students find the task meaningful they will learn quickly". In addition, Turnbull (2001) explains more the use of L1 in the classroom takes away the students' opportunity to have contact with the target language when they do not have much contact outside the classroom.



It could also lead to demotivation of the students because (Tsukatomo, 2012) students in an EFL environment do not have much exposure, either input or output, to L2 as it is not a necessary component in their daily life. Overall, the ideas above support the monolingual approach in which the use of the mother tongue is not recommended for the instructional language choice in the process of foreign language acquisition because the existence of other languages can hinder the maximization of the target language.

However, the above policies reap some critics. Lo (2015, p.270) completely explains that teachers can use L1 appropriately when giving instruction to suit their students' needs in which they used a significant proportion of L1 at classroom to explain the subject content, interact with students and develop students' L2 metalinguistic awareness for students with limited second language proficiency and in contrast, teachers used little first language only, mainly to provide translation equivalents for L2 subject-specific vocabulary items with students in a highly proficiency level of English.

Mokhtar (2015) also states that code-switching is focused to enhance the students' understanding and to save the time from lengthy explanation when the students are in doubt. In addition, Voicu asserts that it is impossible to learn a foreign language without entrusting to some extent on your first language, and the encouragement to look for similarities and also to draw conclusions based on them is as strong here as in any other learning context (2012, p.2012). The concept of grammar found in learning English is too different from the context that is applying in some foreign countries. So, mother tongue plays an important role in providing comparisons and examples if students get more difficulty in understanding the pattern. Khati (2011, p.43) & Ma (2016, p.1) reinforce that the students' knowledge of their mother tongue is the greatest asset and rich source that they generally bring to the classroom to facilitate English language acquisition.

According to Mahmutoğlu & Kıcı (2013, p.50), a focus of foreign language learning should be concentrated to the students' level, age and background, and the teachers' perceptions when teaching the language. If the



teacher insists on using only the target language in EFL classrooms while ignoring students' background, they may feel to force to use the language and may resent learning. Precisely it slows down the pace of the learners who are willing to learn and use the language. The statement can be understood the lower level of students' ability and proficiency in the target language, the more they need the mother tongue to facilitate them in learning the language.

Previous Research Finding: The Rationales for Supporting Bilingual Approach.

Most of the present studies in some areas of EFL countries find out both teachers and students need mother tongue in the classroom interaction. The following are:

Timor (2012) conducted his study in Israel under the title "Use of the Mother Tongue in Teaching a Foreign Language". The subject of the study was 112 English language teachers in Hebrew-speaking elementary and secondary schools in Israel. The research tool was a questionnaire designed specifically for the purpose of the study. He showed that teachers' overall attitude towards MT use in FL classrooms is positive; they report using the MT for teaching purposes and a small number use the MT for classroom management purposes, such as giving instructions, handling discipline problems, or keeping rapport with students.

Lo (2015) in his study "How much L1 is too much? Teachers' language use in response to students' abilities and classroom interaction in Content and Language Integrated Learning" at Hong Kong used both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The finding was when teaching students with limited L2 proficiency, teachers used a significant proportion of L1 in lessons to explain the subject content, interact with students and develop students' L2 metalinguistic awareness. In contrast, with students highly proficient in L2, teachers used little L1, mainly to provide translation equivalents for L2 subject-specific vocabulary items.



Paker & Karaağaç (2015), “The use and functions of mother tongue in EFL classes”, have done the research study at Turkey in the School of Foreign Languages at Pamukkale University, and it was based on both qualitative and quantitative research designs. The participants were 20 English instructors working in the School of Foreign Languages and their 286 students. The data were collected through classroom recordings, questionnaires that were administered to both the instructors and the students, and interviews were conducted with all of the instructors and randomly chosen 39 students. Our data have revealed that mother tongue is an inseparable part of language teaching, and it actually has different functions like “rapport building purposes”, “making the topic/meaning clear (by giving examples, explaining, making extra explanations, etc.)”, “explaining difficult concepts or ideas”, etc. It was also found out that both the instructors and the students were aware of the importance of using the target language as much as possible in the classes, however, they could not deny the need of mother tongue from time to time.

Yataganbaba & Yildirim (2015) also investigated Turkish EFL Young Language Learner teachers’ code-switching from English to Turkish in their classroom discourse. The data were collected from two different Turkish secondary private institutions in Adana and Denizli. Three EFL teachers and their fifth-grade intermediate level classrooms were recorded for two class hours via video camera, and then the recordings were transcribed and explored. While face-to-face semi-structured interview was held with, three teachers and these interviews were analyzed through content analysis. The results showed that all the teachers who took part in this study used CS to varying extents and it revealed that the teachers used CS for 20 different purposes and they employed CS mainly for translation, meta-language, asking equivalence, giving instruction and classroom management purposes. Finally, the results of interview analyses showed that the teachers found CS useful for language learning; however, they cautiously emphasized that L1 should not replace L2 in the classroom.

All of the above latter studies explain that using mother tongue is not the problem and they support the application of bilingual approach at the classroom



interaction. However, the problem is when and how to use it. Cai & Cook (2015) suggest advocating a judicious use of the own language because it often neglects the many educational contexts in which a very high proportion of teaching is conducted in the students' own language. Many studies show that (Khatai, 2011; Mahmoudi, 2011; Kayaoğlu, 2012; Voicu, 2012; Tsukatomo, 2012) target language must be used where possible and L1 when necessary because limited use of mother tongue is beneficial and overuse of it may counter-productive as it encourages the low exposure in the target language. The more students are exposed to the target language, the more successful they become.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

For all EFL countries, the internalization of English acquisition centered in the classroom. Therefore, a teacher is the key to maximize teaching and learning process in the EFL classroom. The teacher needs to preserve a dynamic interaction and collaboration with students, a teacher must function himself not only as a facilitator but also as a learning partner, a teacher uses the power of teacher talk as wisely as possible, choose the right language of instruction to make the students can understand quickly and also provide opportunities for students to express ideas and create their own learning activities creativity. Thus, the teacher serves as a medium to achieve learning objectives.

However, when we evaluate and investigate more the reality occurs at EFL classes, there are some problems often arise which become the inhibiting factors in achieving the maximum learning goals. The two common problems are teacher talk time and teacher's instructional language choice. Teachers who still adopt the traditional teacher-fronted classrooms dominate the conversation at class; all the activities depend on teacher initiation, students' response and teacher follow-up. Absolutely, it limits the students talk more and it results the proportion of teacher talk is more than student talk. EFL teachers face the hesitation in choosing the language used in the teaching process.

It will be a satisfaction to the teachers when the students can master the target language as much as possible. The next question is "what is the right



language to be used in the process of transferring knowledge?, Do the teachers use English only or insert the students' mother tongue?. If the teachers use English only, a particular lesson will be very difficult to explain such as the concept of grammar which is not found in EFL countries. However, if the teachers involve mother tongue, the next problem that arises is the EFL teachers sometimes cannot control the proportion of their first language use.

Through this recent study, the researcher suggests that teachers should function their teacher talk as the central point. Nevertheless, they have to control the quantity and the quality of their talk to gain an effective teaching and learning process in the EFL classroom. It is more advantageous to reduce Teacher Talk Time and increase Student Talk Time based on the students' need because too much teacher talk will have an impact on decreased student learning motivation. When teaching the students who share a common national language, it will be helpful for overcoming cognitive difficulties if teachers insert mother tongue for the certain condition such as to translate difficult words from reading the text and to explain grammar. However, the teachers have to keep a principled and judicious use of mother tongue because a very high proportion of it also limits the students' achievement. If the students are exposed more to the second language, they will become more successful.

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