

TEACHER TALK AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (A Case Study of a Pre-Service Teacher in EFL Classroom)

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Abstract: The background of this research stemmed from the issue of significant role of teacher talk in promoting students' learning opportunities. It was found how teacher interruptions made students had fewer learning opportunities as the teacher became dominant and took over the discussion. Thus, this research was intended to investigate the types of teacher talk produced and its influence towards students' learning opportunities. The research was conducted in an EFL classroom of one public junior high school in Bandung by involving a pre-service teacher as the participant. The research employed a qualitative case study design in which the data were collected through video-taping, field notes, and teacher talk checklist. The analysis of the teacher talk employed the CA (Conversation Analysis) methodology while the influence of teacher talk was analyzed from field notes transcription. The research found that the most frequent type of teacher talk occurred was construction type which increased the learning opportunities for students. Further analysis on the influence of the teacher talk showed how teacher's ability to manage the classroom and develop a good relationship through controlling the teacher talk had successfully maintained the flow of interaction in the classroom.

Keywords: *teacher talk, students' learning opportunity, classroom interaction*

Introduction

Through the result of an observation in the real classroom situation, it had been found how teacher talk produced during a classroom interaction influenced the students' learning opportunities. In terms of providing students' learning opportunities, the teacher talk produced can be classified into two

different categories which consist of two different types: construction and obstruction (Walsh 2002).

Construction type of teacher talk provides more learning opportunities for students while the obstruction teacher talk gives less opportunities for students to learn. An ideal classroom where students have maximum opportunity to learn

requires a teacher who can control their language use in the classroom. Teacher should be able to intertwine the language use and learning goal, so the learning opportunities can be facilitated (Walsh, 2002). Concerning on how teacher talk and learning opportunities serve as crucial part of the learning process in an EFL classroom, two research questions have been formulated as follows.

- a. What are types of teacher talk produced in the classroom?
- b. To what extent does the teacher talk influence students' learning opportunities?

Literature Review

- **Classroom Discourse**

Discourse can be seen from many perspectives, thus it is not easy to define it in particular definition (Suhherdi, 2010). Many other experts also tried to define discourse. For example, Phillips & Jorgensen

Discourse is about knowledge and community. It maintains the degree of openness and flexibility in relation to its meaning. The value of discourse is similar to culture as it can be called as a heuristic

tool in which the value is likely to be lost if we try to pin the meaning of the term down too precisely (2002).

In addition to that, Suhherdi (2010) narrowed down the definition of discourse as classroom discourse into a more specific one; the realization of social interaction which in this case is the classroom interaction. Classroom interaction between teacher and students which is happened through dialogue or conversation has been highlighted by Stubbs (1976) as the major part of educational process. Apart from revealing power by which intricacy of meaning that is hidden behind teaching practices is readily understandable, classroom discourse analysis also allows easier ways to identify and interpret the teachers' choice of language varieties and learning content in a teaching endeavor with its level of accuracy (Suhherdi, 2010). Meanwhile, the definition of context can be described as any elements that accompany text (Emilia, 2005). So, it can be said that any interaction in an EFL classroom is seen as a social context in its own right, worthy of

study and scrutiny, but not by comparing it to other context (Walsh, 2002).

- **Teacher Talk**

Teacher has the authority to control what goes on in the classroom through their language use (Johnson, 1995, p 9 in Walsh, 2002, p 5). In relation with learning opportunities, more detailed classification of teacher talk which occurs in the classroom interaction between teacher and students can be classified as construction and obstruction (Walsh, 2002). More descriptions on each category of teacher talk are as follows.

- a. Direct error correction*

Teacher uses direct approach in correcting errors which results in the far less time-consuming.

- b. Content feedback*

Teacher reacts to comments from students by making use of humor. Teacher tries to use the conversational language, so the genuine communication can be more conducive.

- c. Checking for confirmation*

Teacher does not satisfy with the first contribution given by the

students. Teacher usually negotiates the answer given.

- d. Extended wait-time*

Teacher allowed more time for students to formulate their answer or responses.

- e. Scaffolding*

Teacher intervenes and fills in the missing language. Teacher should be able to listen actively and make economical use of language. Teacher only gives language support when it is necessary.

- f. Turn completion*

Teacher completes the student turn. Teacher takes over the language that should have produced by the students.

- g. Teacher echo*

Teacher gives immediate feedback which makes students lose the thread of what they were saying. Mostly, teacher repeats students' answers unnecessarily.

- h. Teacher interruptions*

Teacher does not give time for students to comprehend what they want to say. Teacher does not give opportunity for students to response.

- **Teacher Talk and Learning Opportunities**

In an EFL classroom, the understanding of classroom discourse as social context should focus on quality by emphasizing the important relationship between language use and pedagogic purposes (Walsh, 2002). Since the teacher talk is emphasized in terms of its quality, the teacher talk produced should be in line with the complexity of the task given. Due to the limited evidence had by learner-learner interaction in increasing the participation in the classroom, it is very suggested to gain more of negotiation for meaning between learner and teacher (Foster, 1998 as cited in Walsh, 2002). When no negotiation for meaning happens between teacher and students, it becomes very possible for the teachers to take control the whole interaction in the classroom by themselves without giving any opportunities for students to learn. In order to keep the intertwining of teacher talk and learning goals, teacher should avoid that thing to happen in the classroom. Those two possibilities of how the relationship between teacher talk and learning

opportunities is likely to occur in the real classroom language situation. Thus, teacher should pay attention more on maintaining the teacher talk so they can facilitate the learning opportunities for students.

- **Teacher-students Relationship**

Teacher-student relationship leads to a successful learning environment through developing personal connection between student and teacher which is followed by the attempts of teacher to culturally maintain positive relationship through teacher talk. Teacher should have interactional awareness by controlling their use of language in making some strategies to enhance students' participation in the learning conversation for the improvement of cognitive ability and develop personal connection serves as the indication for social ability.

- **The Role of Teacher**

Describing the role of teacher can use metaphor: teacher as manufacturer, teacher as doctor, teacher as judge, teacher as gardener, and others (Rebecca Oxford et al., 1998 in Brown, 2001). In addition to that, there are also other roles of

teacher which are more suitable for classroom interaction such as controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resource (Brown, 2001). These roles had by teacher are significantly related to how teachers positively form their relationships with students.

- **Classroom Management**

Another aspect in classroom interaction which is related to how the successful learning environment can be achieved is how the teachers manage the classroom called as classroom management. Not simply by arranging the lesson plan or activity or even seating arrangement, teacher should be able to control the classroom as a whole. The management of classroom conducted by teacher should cover the physical environment of the classroom, voice and body language, unplanned teaching, and teaching under adverse circumstances (Brown, 2001).

Methodology

The research employed a case study research design. It was chosen due to the phenomenon investigated in the research which focused on

analyzing teacher talk produced in the classroom.

The participant of the research was a pre-service teacher who taught English as Foreign Language in the first grade of one Junior High School in Bandung.

The instruments used to collect the data of the research were gained from classroom observation and video-taping. The data were consecutively taken in five meetings of an EFL classroom in one public junior high school in Bandung. After collecting the data, the analysis was started by transcribing the result of classroom observation which was in the form of videotapes. Having transcribed the videotapes, the teacher talk produced was analyzed by using Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology. Discovering the types of the teacher talk produced was to answer the first research question. In order to remark the second research question, the deepening analysis of framed theories and field notes taken was done to analyze the influence of teacher talk produced towards the students' learning opportunities.

Data Presentation and Discussions

Types of Teacher Talk

- **Construction**

Construction type of teacher talk is defined as a positive interactional classroom feature which results in the increasing of learning opportunities for the students (Walsh 2002)

- a. Scaffolding (50.8%)**

Scaffolding had important role in keeping the flow of interaction between the teacher and the students (Walsh, 2002). Scaffolding necessarily helps students to keep participating in the classroom interaction. For the students were still classified as young learners, producing such type of teacher talk apparently became very reasonable for the teacher. Teacher played the role as a language supporter by continuously helping students in producing the intended utterances.

- b. Content-feedback (17.4 %)**

The visibility of teacher's intention to draw students' interest in the lesson could be read through her pattern in commenting the excruciating detail of responses

uttered by students. Teacher's comments in students' utterances or responses somehow boost their willingness to participate more in the classroom interaction.

- c. Direct-error correction (5.6%)**

By promoting the maximum economy of time allotment in correcting students' error directly, this feature succeeds to become one type of teacher talk preferred by many teachers and also students (Seedhouse 1997 cited in Walsh, 2002). Direct-error correction allows students to go on with their responses by having their errors immediately corrected by the teacher.

- d. Checking for confirmation (25.5 %)**

Not accepting students' first contributions and always seeking for clarification are the way for teacher to maximize learning opportunities for student and even encourage them to participate more (Mucumeci, 1996; Walsh, 2002). Through questioning their responses, teacher stimulates students to explore more of their comprehension.

- e. Extended wait-time (0.7 %)**

Giving extra time for students to answer or respond is aimed to increase students' learning opportunities so they can process longer which results in better outcomes (Nunan, 1991 cited in Walsh, 2002). Teacher provides space for students to formulate more comprehensive answers or responses by giving the more time to deal with questions given.

- **Obstruction**

Types of teacher talk belonged to obstruction have role in neglecting students' learning opportunities. This obstruction feature interrupts the interaction and gives no opportunity for students to participate more in the learning process.

- a. Teacher echo (36.7%)**

Repeating students' answer or response during a classroom interaction can disrupt the flow of classroom interaction (Walsh, 2002). Apparently, the use of echo can become a habit in the classroom without any significant function which can lead to an excessive teacher-students interaction (Walsh, 2006).

- b. Teacher interruptions (46.6%)**

Teacher who has mistakenly the timing can limit the students' learning opportunities and even cause them to stop participating. Students' unwillingness to participate can lead to the failure of learning process.

- c. Turn completion (16.7%)**

Teacher's intention to smooth over discussion by completing the students' answers or responses even when it is not necessary will end up in limiting the students to involve in the discussion itself.

- **The Influence of Teacher Talk towards Students' Learning Opportunities from Classroom Management Analysis**

Fulfilling role as a controller, taking care of the classroom, and being prepared for any possible situation of teaching are the formulation that would lead teacher to successfully done the classroom management part of teaching. The significance coming from the success in managing the classroom comes to the possibility of teacher to create more learning opportunities for the students. The conducted research showed how teacher could deal with

the unplanned teaching situation where the learning media provided for the lesson did not work. Teacher changed the media by using her voice to continue the listening activities so students' learning process kept going on. This finding proves how teacher's ability to manage the classroom in any situations leads the teacher to not neglect the students' learning opportunities.

- **The Influence of Teacher Talk towards Students' Learning Opportunities from Teacher-Students Relationship Analysis**

A good and supportive personal relationship between teacher and students is essential to make a successful learning environment (Hamre&Pianta, p.49). In line with that theory, the conducted research had proven that it worked very well in maintaining the classroom interaction. Having known that the students and teacher were having good personal relationship, it made sense why the students were able to show such high interest in joining the lesson. The good relationship between teacher and students

resulted in how the students did not feel shy to express what they felt during the lesson. They felt free to give comments or response during the interaction in the classroom. It made the teacher had no difficult time to gain students' interests to participate in the learning activities. Some students were even willing to participate voluntarily without being asked by the teacher. This kind of learning environment somehow leads students to have more learning opportunities which can result in better leaning outcomes.

Conclusions

Both construction and obstruction type of teacher talk occurred during the conducted research. Even the number of occurrence was not significant, obstruction type of teacher talk such as teacher echo was found in the transcription analysis. In spite of that, the overall teacher talk classification showed that the construction type was the most frequent of the teacher talk produced. Scaffolding was dominating the result. By producing this positive

feature of teacher talk, teacher succeeded to maintain the flow of interaction in the classroom by creating learning opportunities for students.

Through the field notes taken during classroom observation, the teacher managed to show her ability in managing the classroom and developing a good relationship with the students. The three combinations of producing a constructive teacher talk, managing the classroom as a whole, and developing a good and supportive relationship with the teacher becomes the way for the teacher and students to have a good learning environment. Having a good environment of learning leads students to have more opportunities to learn which will have a good impact on their learning achievements.

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