
THE FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER TALKS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to identify functional characteristics of English teacher talks when delivering material in English classroom for target students in Makassar Islamic University. The design of this research is descriptive qualitative. The data are obtained from talks of four teachers through observation, recording, interview and field notes. The teacher talks are carefully transcribed. The data are analyzed by categorizing the teachers' talks to find out the functional characteristics of the talks. The research indicated nine functional characteristics of teacher talks: introducing material, correcting, repeating, explaining, defining, giving example, clarifying, questioning and encouraging. Each functional characteristic is employed to make the teaching process meaningful for the students' comprehensions.

Keyword: Teacher Talks, Functional Characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

The status of English is as the second language or official language in countries of outer circles provides a lot of exposures of English acquisition. While the expanding or extending circle refers to nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language, but which were not colonized by the countries of the inner circle, and which have not given English any special official status in which these countries, English is taught as a foreign language (Lauder, 2008). The countries of expanding circle are; e.g. China, Europe, Japan, Korea, the Middle East (Kachru & Smith, 2008).

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As a matter of fact, Indonesia is included as one of such circle countries in which English is only used in the school (English classroom) or it is considered as the foreign language posed to interact with the foreigner one.

According to Yanfen & Yuqin (2010), teacher talk is an indispensable part of foreign language teaching in organizing activities, and the way teachers talk not only determines how well they make their lectures, but also guarantees how well students will learn. Teacher Talk is the medium for EFL learners to gain input for their L2 acquisition process in which teacher talk plays very important role to make input easily to comprehend. Allwright & Bayley (1991), define that talk is one of the major ways that teachers convey information to learners, and it is also one of the primary means of controlling learner behavior.

The teacher should not monotonously use their talks during instruction of English material. It will make the instruction is ineffective to create the delivering material for the learners. For instance, the teacher only explains the material without giving the example after explaining, the learners will not get the specific meaning of the subject. It is because the meaning of the material still general. However, the teacher should use the instruction of talks variety during delivering material in order to develop the quality of teaching for the learners' comprehension.

Therefore, speech modifications should be set by the teachers during instructional hours in order to make the language easier to understand and assist the learners in acquiring the target language for the comprehensible material, because of the learners do not acquire the point

of material if they do not understand. It based on the premise that we cannot acquire what we do not understand (Nunan, 1989). When the learners comprehend the explanation of the teacher talks, they will be stimulated to willingness to communicate. For example an English teacher defines the term of “reading” or “pronunciation” to the learners. The teacher must tend to use talk as the strategy to the target language. The students, of course, will respond their talks such as ask the question, commenting, or willingness to communicate. In addition, the teacher’s modification on explaining the material and the using of the syntactic structure of the teacher talk plays very important in the learning process classroom and it should be effectively expressed when it is used as the type in presenting the material in the classroom. So, this study focuses on investigation of the type of teacher talk in delivering material in English classroom Makassar Islamic University (UIM).

Based on the background above, the writer interests to conduct the research of “*The Functional Characteristics Of Teacher Talk In English Classroom*”. The research question of this study is “What functional characteristics of teacher talks do the English teachers use when delivering material in English classroom?”. The objective of this study is to identify the functional characteristics of teacher talks used by English teachers when delivering the material in English classroom.

Teacher Talk

According to Krashen teacher talk is foreigner talk in the classroom, the language of classroom management and explanation, when it is in the second language (1984:24). In MA Xiao-yan’s view, teacher talk

is concluded into two definitions; firstly, teacher talk in English classrooms is regarded as one special variety of the English language, so it has its own specific features which other varieties do not share, it is because of the restriction of the physical setting, special participants as well as the goal of teaching, teacher talk has its own special style. Secondly, teacher talk is a special communicative activity in which its goal is to communicate with students and develops students' foreign language proficiency (2006: 5). That is very strongly demanded for the English teacher to lead his/her students learn or acquire the material through variety language. The main function of the second language teacher is to help input comprehensible (Krashen, 1982: 64).

So, teacher talk for the language is refer to talk that the teacher expresses in EFL classroom in which it is used by teacher to instruct or deliver the material in order to lead the learners effectively comprehend the material as well as the medium for target language in the classroom. Furthermore, we can say that teacher talk is the typical language that is used by foreign or second language teacher in order to explain the subject in the classroom.

The Functional Characteristics

The function of talks that is produced by the teacher during the process teaching could make the material clear. No matter what teaching strategies or methods a teacher uses, it is necessary to give directions, explain activities, clarify the procedures students should use on an activity, and check students' understanding (Richards and Lockhart 1996: 182). Teacher talk can be found in some characteristics. The term of the

characteristics in this study occur through talks that employed by the teacher in order to deliver material such as explaining, defining, correcting and etc. Characteristic is a typical feature or quality that something or somebody has (Hornby A. S., 2006: 235). So, functional characteristics of teacher talks can be defined as the language used to organize or set the material easier to comprehend by the learners.

By that way, the teachers provide the comprehensibility of the meaning material or negotiate the real meaning in order to facilitate for the development of the students' language and academic knowledge in contents area.

Furthermore, teacher talk can be divided into two characteristics of language. The first is the identification of language in which the teachers use in their language in order to manage or to organize the classrooms activities, and the second is the identification of language in which the teachers use in conveying the material for the learners in the classroom. Xue wen cited in Xiao-Yan (2006: 13) reveals that commonly, in the classroom interaction creates two features in which the features are categorized as functional features and formal features in which the first feature functional features refer to the language used by the teacher for the organization and management of the classroom, including the quantity and quality of the teacher talk, the questions that are used by the teachers, the interactional modifications and adjustments, and the teachers' feedback. While "formal feature" is discussed in the next article.

1. Introducing material.

Before explaining material, the teacher introduces what subject will be discussed in order to lead the learners focus on the main goal of the subject. Introducing material is employed in the beginning of instruction or it is as opening of meeting class. The opening of a lesson consists of the procedures the teacher uses to focus the students' attention on the learning aims of the lesson (Richard and Lockhart, 1996: 114).

2. Questioning.

In the process of teaching, questioning is employed by the teacher as the activity to ask the learners about something. Questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers Richard and Lockhart (1996: 185).

The question is categorized into three kinds by Richard and Lockhart (1996: 186). The following items are the kinds of question:

a. Procedural Question

Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures and routines and classroom management. This kind of question is used to make sure that the smooth flow of the teaching process.

b. Convergent Questions.

Convergent Questions encourage similar student responses, or responses which focus on a central theme. These responses are often short answers, such as “ yes ” or “ no ” or short statements. They do not usually require students to engage in high-level thinking in order to come up with a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information.

c. Divergent Questions

Divergent Questions are the opposite of convergent questions. These questions encourage diverse student responses which are not short answers and which require students to engage in higher-level thinking. They encourage students to provide their own in/formation rather than recall previously presented information.

d. Correction.

It is a very crucial of the teacher's role to recognize the learners' mistakes and provide correction during the process of delivering material. In correction, some specific information is provided on aspects of the learners' performance, through explanation, or provision of better or other alternatives, or through elicitation of these from the learner (Ur, 2000 cited in Xiao-yan: 2006). Correction means here is to lead the learners' incorrect answer or response from the teacher.

Generally, the teachers always adopt the following techniques to correct students' errors (Ur, 2000:249 cited in Xiao Yan). The Ur's correction techniques are as follows:

- 1) Does not react at all.
- 2) Indicates there is a mistake, but does not provide any further information about what is wrong.
- 3) Says what was wrong and provides a model of the acceptable version. That is explicit correction.
- 4) Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from the learner who de the mistake (Self-repair).

5) Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from another member of the class.

6) Ask the learner who made the mistake to reproduce the corrected version.

Provides or elicits an explanation of why the mistake was made and how to avoid it

e. Encouragement

To encourage the learners to learn in the classroom, the teacher should express and select what kind of phrases are appropriate used to address the learners such as expressions of joy, motivation, interest, etc. Xiao Yan adds that Teachers should employ as much approval and encouragement as possible in foreign language classrooms, which will be conducive to the development of the students' positive affect and the foreign language learning.

The language is used by the English teacher for the subject matter should be the primary attention to make the learners comprehend the meaning of the material. The characteristics of the teachers' talks during classroom hours are quite important to help the learners get the point of teachers' explanation. The functional characteristics of teacher talk may be on the conceptual role of pronunciation, lexis or discourse that emerge particularly in different context and situation. In such a statement, the researcher believes that the teacher influences English language learning and literacy development in the critical of teacher discourse. Therefore, the teachers should be selective or comprehend what language that will be used to efficiently deliver material in order to create the comfortable

learning atmosphere and the teacher as well as should produce or pronounce the words or sentences clearly to make the meaning of explanation easier comprehended.

Doff 1993 (cited in Muhayyang, 2010: 31) classifies two types of the teacher talk namely; the first is instructional talk which is employed to present the lesson or language content, and the second is management talk which is used to manage classroom activities. He adds that in conjunction with the use of these two language functions in English as foreign language can be used in class through two main ways, namely 1) it is used to in teaching the lesson (instructional talk), and 2) it is used for the ongoing activities within the lesson which are not inherently part of teaching (management talk). The following items of both functions reviewed by Muhayyang (2010; 33:34);

1. Instructional talks.

There are twenty four language functions reviewed as instructional language namely; Introduction, asking for information, explaining, encouraging, giving direction, correcting, interrupting, introducing material, giving examples, attracting attention, reminding, consolidating, drilling, changing topic, reading students' writing, asking to do something, interpreting, acknowledging, finding out about language, repeating, commenting, checking comprehension, giving suggestion and dictating.

2. Management talks

There are fifteen language functions reviewed as Management talk to set the classroom activities namely; greeting, instruction, asking for information, talk/chatting to students, checking attendance,

grouping/telling students where to sit, encouraging, giving turn, thanking, apologizing, advising, acknowledging, asking to do something, marker and ending lesson.

Based on Muhayyang's reviews, it can said that the function of teacher talk means that the utterance which is expressed by the teacher to deliver or to convey the material in the classroom and to create or to manage the activities to the process of teaching and learning and to facilitate the comprehensible input in the classroom.

In addition, the function of teacher talk facilitates or provides the input comprehensible for the learners when the teacher delivers material in the classroom. Through the function of talk, the teacher does not only make the material clear for the input but also the teacher can build up the communication with the learners to check the understanding. For more detail, the writer defines that the functional characteristics of teacher talk is the various talks creatively used by the teacher addressed to the students to make the material easily comprehended.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this research is qualitative approach. This approach may help the writer to identify or to categorize the collected data from the technique of collecting data. The purpose of this approach is to contextualize and to interpret (SandraLee McKay, 2006), furthermore, Mc. Kay elaborates that there is an interpretive analysis of the data and categorization of the data. The strength of qualitative research, for example, is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions.

The participants of this research are the English teachers in English department of Makassar Islamic University (UIM). The participants of this reseach consist of four English teachers both males (3 persons) and a female from nine English teachers. These participants are taken by using simple random sampling. The process of collecting a simple in such a way that all individuals in the the defined population have an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample (Gay *et. al.*, 2006). Moreover, the English teaching experiences of all teachers of UIM are quite similar because they all have experienced through the process of EFL pedagogy.

Procedure of Collecting Data

Before starting doing observation, the writer shows the consent form or takes permission to the teacher. After getting the teacher's consent, the writer selects the possible position to observe the teacher's activities by using the classroom observation check list and the writer uses audio recorder to record the teacher's talk during instruction or when the teacher explains the material to the learners. After recording, the writer transcribes the data and identifies all language episodes, while observation checklist is conducted after transcribing the data from recording in order to obtain the categorized data.

Technique of Collecting Data

In this study, the collected data from the instruments area analyzed descriptive qualitatively. This method is applied by analyzing of the teachers' expression or utterances in the classroom, the writer starts from classroom of English subject by using recorder. It, then is figured out and categorized. A category is a classification of ideas or concepts (Gay, L. R, *et. al.*, 2006: 471). It aims to find out the functional characteristics of the teachers which are addressed to the learners particularly in delivering material, while the result from observation checklist is used to support the

data which has been categorized. Moreover, the analysis is initiated by describing function of teacher talks to elaborate the characteristics of them when the delivery of material is in progress.

FINDINGS

Based on the result of the study, the functional characteristics of teacher talk that identified are nine categories namely; introducing material, correcting, repeating, explaining, defining, giving example, clarifying, questioning and encouraging. Those characteristics are used by the teacher to deliver the meaning of material. The characteristics functions facilitate the learners' comprehension input in which the six characteristics of nine are most frequently used in process of delivering material. The conclusion of the findings, the target language of delivering material is effective by employing those characteristics.

DISCUSSION

The use of the functional characteristics of teacher talks could make material easily delivered by the teacher. Those functional characteristics are the way in which have a good contribution in facilitating the learners' comprehension input. The employing of functional characteristics of teacher talk in delivering material could create good instruction for the teachers in the classroom. It was proved by teachers' success in transferring meaning of the material to make their material comprehensible.

Dealing with the research question, it aims to identify the functional characteristics of teacher talk used by English teachers in English classroom of Makassar Islamic University (UIM). From the result in identifying the characteristics of teacher talk through transcription are applied in delivering material effectively, the teachers try to develop their talks to the learners to make them comprehend about the subject or material which is being discussed during classroom hour. The efforts of teachers provide the learners with comprehension input, the teachers sometimes employ the characteristics by their own way of talks. Furthermore, at the moment the teachers during delivering material, they use explanation a lot in order to lead the learners think the meaning of the material for comprehensible.

During explaining the material, the teachers sometimes change or modify the statement of explanation to be more effectively comprehend and after explaining the term, the teachers sometimes test the learners' comprehension through asking the question concerned to the explained material. Giving example is another more used by the teachers in the way of facilitating the comprehension in learning process. When giving the example of the material in process of instruction, the teachers seem to make clearer or detail from any explanation or order that they are saying. Defining material is the way of teachers used to make the learners focus on specific meaning of the term, while repeating was used to be conveyed with language or expressive varieties might make the teachers' words, phrases or sentences delivered efficient for the learners' opportunity of cognitive load. The process of teachers' instruction in delivering material

which is assigned in the result of the functional characteristics of talk occur in the classroom, five functional characteristics of teacher talk are most frequently used namely; explaining, giving example, questioning, defining and repeating. It indicates that the use of the functional characteristics of teacher talk are effective for the learners' comprehension input. Mere exposure to the target language is not enough; the teacher's utterances have to work as input (Wong-Fillmore, in Lin 2005). Or the other words, when the material is already inside of the learners' input, it must be understood.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the the teacher talk as the means for the teachers in delivering material effectively. As a result, it can be said that teacher talk includes the functional characteristics of talks are effective for the teacher in which the nine characteristics lead the students to the process of comprehension of material.

SUGGESTIONS

Some suggestions address for the teachers and further writers. For English teachers, although the writer has proven that the use of functional characteristics of teacher talk could facilitate the learners' comprehension input, the English teachers are suggested to implement the teaching of reading material by using those characteristics. The teacher should provide appropriate material for any level of the student. For further writers, they can conduct more elaborative research studies by developing the variety talks by considering the students' interest.

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