CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN AN EYL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study analyzed the classroom interaction in an EYL classroom by describing its communication contents and patterns of interaction. The data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interview for the teacher. The writer observed the spoken communication between the EYL teacher and 39 fifth graders in a national elementary school using the video and audio recorders. Others, teacher's interview and field notes were the supplementary data. Having been transcribed, the data were analyzed using the adapted form of FLint system. The results showed that asking questions (20.05%), giving information (10.09%), and repeating students response verbatim (6.65%) were the top three of the communication contents expressed by the teacher. On the other hand, the top three of the communication contents expressed by the students were students' choral response to the teacher (17.61%), individual student response to the teacher (13.27%), student's nonverbal behavior (4.84%). At last, the pattern of interaction revealed was still teacher-centered since most of the interactions were initiated by the teacher. In other words, the expectation of K13 in this study was not yet fulfilled. However, the students showed active participation during the lesson. This study can give valuable contributions to English teachers by broadening their horizon about EYL classroom interaction.

Keywords: classroom interaction, EYL, FLint system

INTRODUCTION

As the world's lingua franca in the globalization era, English has established itself as one of the important subjects to be taught, especially in non-English speaking countries. In Asia particularly, there has been a tendency to lower the age at which children begin to learn a foreign language, since it is believed that the earlier a child starts to learn a foreign language, the greater the ultimate achievement will be (McKay, 2006). The increasing number of children learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) is the evidence of the necessity of English learning in the global world.

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Nevertheless, there is a prevalent problem in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom where English is mostly not a language for active communication in Indonesia. The stereotype of non-Asian and Asian culture is widely known as one of the main causes. In non-Asian countries, teachers do not spend large amounts of time-lecturing but try to lead the children in productive interactions and discussions which form the students into active participants in the learning process. In Asian countries, the learning behaviour is mostly teacher-centred learning where all the information required is supplied by the teacher and the students are the recipients (Tang, 1991; Gow & Kember, 1990). On the contrary, according to the Acts of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 Year 2003 Article 1 verse (19), the recent curriculum, K13, pushes teachers to move away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom.

Regarding the importance of investigating interaction in classroom discourse, this study is mainly going to find out the communication contents which are expressed by the teacher and the students in English for Young Learners (EYL) classroom interaction. It aims to contribute such a valuable feedback in analyzing the teacher's teaching and learning activity and students' comprehension level by adapting the Foreign Language Interaction (FLint) System of interaction analysis (Moskowitz, 1967). After the communication contents had been analayzed, the patterns of interaction between the teacher and fifth grade students in the EYL classroom were identified and then discussed further in the present study of the writer since high numbers of classroom interaction exhibits active communication in the classroom.

METHOD

This study was a qualitative study which used a non-participant observation to collect the data. The participants of this study were an EYL teacher and one class of grade 5 which consisted of 23 male and 16 female students of national elementary school in Surabaya, a city in East Java Province of Indonesia. Through classroom observation, the writer recorded (the audio and audio-visual data), analyzed, and then described the fifth grade students' interactions in an English classroom both with their teacher and with their peers. Another supplementary data collection method, semi-structured interview (with the teacher), was used to support the data gained from the observation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

There were five times observations on EYL classroom interaction and the data were mainly analyzed from the transcription of the classroom recordings on the observations. The results are presented in several tables below.

Table 1. Teacher Talk in the Fifth Graders' Classroom Interaction

			Observations					(%)
			I (%)	II (%)	III (%)	IV (%)	V (%)	
Teacher Talk	Indirect	1. Dealing with feelings	0.65	0.18	-	0.96	-	0.36
		2. Praising or encouraging	5.37	4.33	0.65	0.43	0.67	2.29
		3. Joking	-	0.90	1.53	0.11	-	0.51
		4. Using ideas of students	5.37	3.25	4.37	6.59	5.59	5.03
		5. Repeating sts response verbatim	9.45	8.12	1.75	9.03	4.92	6.65
		6. Asking questions	21.82	16.43	20.09	24.23	17.67	20.05
	Direct	7. Giving information	4.40	8.48	17.47	4.89	15.21	10.09
		8. Correcting without rejection	4.72	4.69	3.06	3.08	2.24	3.56
		9. Giving directions	3.42	7.04	7.64	4.99	9.84	6.59
		10. Direct pattern drills	-	-	-	-	-	-
		11. Criticizing students' behaviour	0.33	1.81	1.53	2.34	5.37	2.28
		12. Criticizing students' response	0.65	1.26	1.53	0.64	0.67	0.95
							Total	**58**

There were two components of teacher talk that influenced the students: indirect and direct talk. Indirect talk consists of *dealing with feelings, praising or encouraging, joking, using ideas of students, repeating student response verbatim*, and *asking questions*. Table 1 shows *dealing with feelings* (0.36%) occurs as the least teacher talk (indirect talk) in this study, which means that the teacher seldom predicts or recalls

the students' feeling. This category usually appears when the teacher begins the lesson. *Using ideas of students* (5.03%) occurs in more frequent times rather than *dealing with feeling*. *Joking* (0.51%) and *praising or encouraging* (2.29%) appears in a higher amount than dealing with feelings but lower than using ideas of students. It means that the teacher rarely gives jokes to break the ice or to create relaxed learning atmosphere. At the top, *asking questions* (20.05%) is found as the most frequently used category among all teacher talk's components (indirect influence). Then, the second top category is *repeating student response verbatim* (6.65%).

As for the direct talk (teacher talk), there are six categories found: *giving information, correcting without rejection, giving directions, direct pattern drills, criticizing students' behaviour,* and *criticizing students' response*. Table 1 shows that the lowest percentage is *direct pattern drills* (0%) which never occured in each of observations. Based on the data, it reveals that the teacher seldom gave feedback in the form of marks and comments. As a proof, *criticising students' response* (0.95%) and *criticizing students' behaviour* (2.28%) appear a little bit higher than *direct pattern drills* and lower than *praising or encouraging* category. It indicates that the teacher gave positive feedback more than negative feedback to the students. Another category in direct influence, *correcting without rejection* (3.56%) appears quite often but lower than *giving directions* (6.59%). Then, the dominant type which appears almost in each meeting is *giving information* (10.09%).

Table 2. Student Talk in the Fifth Graders' Classroom Interaction

		Communication Contents	Observations					(%)
			I (%)	II (%)	III (%)	IV (%)	V (%)	
Student Talk	13.	Students' choral response to the teacher	25.08	14.26	12.22	18.81	17.67	17.61
	14.	Individual student response to the teacher	10.75	14.62	16.59	12.11	12.30	13.27
	15.	Student's response to the teacher in L1: triggered by the teacher spontaneously	4.40	5.96	-	4.99	-	3.07
		in spontaneous way	0.33	1.26	1.31	1.17	1.34	1.08

	Communication Contents	Observations					(%)
		I (%)	II (%)	III (%)	IV (%)	V (%)	
16.	Student's peer's response to the teacher	0.65	0.18	-	-	-	0.17
17.	Silence	0.49	0.54	1.31	1.38	-	0.74
18.	Laughter	0.65	0.18	2.18	1.06	0.22	0.86
19.	Student's nonverbal behavior	1.47	6.50	6.77	3.19	6.26	4.84
						Total	42

Based on table 1 and 2, the percentage of communication contents of student talk (42%) only takes a small proportion out of the total classroom interaction. In table 2, *students' choral response to the teacher* and *individual student response to the teacher* which take big proportions in interaction, 18.08% and 13.01%. The least till the most frequent appears in turns in a steady numbers such as *student with peer's response to the teacher* (0.17%), *silence* (0.74%), *laughter* (0.86%), *student's response to the teacher in L1 in spontaneous way* (1.08%), *student's response to the teacher in L1 triggered by the teacher spontaneously* (3.07%), and *student's nonverbal behavior* (4.84%).

Table 3. Summary of the Percentage of Teacher Talk and Student Talk

Observation	Teacher Talk (TT)		Student Talk (ST)	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
Day 1	345	56.2	269	43.8
Day 2	313	56.5	241	43.5
Day 3	273	59.6	185	40.4
Day 4	539	57.3	402	42.7
Day 5	278	62.2	169	37.8
Total	1748	**58**	1266	**42**

(Note: Freq. =frequency)

Based on table 3, teacher talk has greater amount (58%) compared to the student talk (42%). The percentage of teacher talk is in line with Chaudron (1988) statement that teacher talk takes up the largest proportion of classroom talk.

Discussion

As illustrated in Table 1, *asking questions* shows as the highest percentage (20.05%) compared to other categories in teacher talk. This is in line with Gall (1984) who cites that in some classrooms, over half of the time is used for question-and-answer exchanges. By posing some questions, the teacher can get benefical feedbacks from his students. In the application, the teacher said that the ratio between the teacher asked the students some questions and the students answered the teacher's questions were 50:50. Based on table 1, *correcting without rejecion* and *criticizing students' response,* occupy 3.56% and 0.95% (lower percentage) of the total class time. It means more teacher's questions arouse more interactions and better answers from the students.

Besides, Slattery & Willis (2001) add that mother and teacher talk provide a secure and supportive environment which gives the children confidence to try out a language. Thus, young learners need assistances from the adults. Wheldall & Merrett (1987) cite a large number of studies showing that rewards like praises, are far more effective in bringing about positive changes than punishment. Besides, the aim of praising is for telling students what they have said or done is valued, and encouraging is to give them confidence, confirming that their answers are correct (Brown, 2001:170). However, based on the result of this study, it shows low percentage in *praising or encouraging* category (2.29%) and there were lack of variation of giving *praises* to the students such as 'Excellent', 'Well-done', 'Fantastic', and 'Awesome'. For EYL learners, it is good to give them new words since they are learning by doing. To sum up, in non-English speaking country, active learners can sucessfully acquire the target language since practice makes perfect. However, in the traditional classroom of Asian culture, the students tend to be passive learners who listen to the teacher's explanation and direction. In this study, indirect talk of teacher talk (34.89%) was found more often than the direct one (23.47%). This result showed that the teacher was keen in pushing the students to the limit to speak more. By asking questions, the teacher was able to analyze his students' level of understanding and the students' weaknesses. Besides, more intimate and informal relationship with the students were built by asking the students' feelings or conditions, appreciating their hard works, and giving jokes. Praising or encouraging is not the only way to appreciate the students' hard works. Instead of that category, using ideas of the students was another way for building a closer relationship with the students. As a result, the closer the relationship between the teacher and the students, the better the students absorb the materials from the teacher, and the faster the students acquire their target language. Therefore, the higher percentages found in indirect talk (teacher talk) categories caused more interaction

between the teacher and students in the EYL classroom. As a proof, *students' responses* were in the highest rank in the student talk's category.

As illustrated in Table 2, the role of motivation influences the young learners interaction in the classroom and their motivation usually comes from outside, which is called extrinsic motivation. However, based on table 1, the percentage of *praising and encouraging* category was found in a low amount, 2.29%. It means the students still need more encouragements from the teacher. On the other hand, based on table 2, it can be seen the most frequent category found in the student talk are *choral* (17.61%) *and individual (13.27%) response* from the students. Those responses mostly come from the teacher's questions which are given to check the comprehension and confirmation of their understanding toward the material given. It seems that through the questions, they were motivated to respond. Therefore, the extrinsic motivation of the students mostly come from the teacher's elicitation by posing them questions. Apart from the dominance of teacher talk, the teacher's questions have an implication to students' motivation which was high in classroom interaction. According to Moore (2008), the advantage of student talk is to make the students acquire the knowledge and exchange the information through interaction. For example, a student who is talking with his/her peers can exchange the information about their experience, their hobbies, and many more. By interacting with their peers, young learners are able to achieve their target knowledge well. However, the category of *student with peer's response to the teacher* was found as the least of all student talk categories.

As illustrated in Table 3, the realization of this classroom interaction is still dominated by the teacher. The data show the ratio of the teacher talk and student talk which are fifty eight-to-forty two. In non-English speaking countries, the teacher tends to talk more to elicit the students to speak as English is not their first language and besides, it is to break the cuture of silence. So, the ratio of fifty eight-to-forty two is also good for this EYL class considering the Asian setting which the teacher provides all the information required and the students are the recipients in learning the target language. Based on the result, the dominance in the teacher talk in this study (58%) comes from the category of *asking question* (20.05%) which means teacher did more elicitations and prompts to the students. Apparently, the teacher's assistance is still needed for EYL learners as the process of their target language achievement so that they can participate actively during the lesson. This is in line with the ideas of ZPD, the role of social interaction as a mechanical for individual development where the child can do with the help of the adult, and learning through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Donato, 1994). It shows that the role of adults/teachers is still necessary as the provider to create the opportunity for the interactive interaction.

On the contrary, according to the Acts of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 Year 2003 Article 1 verse (19), there is a change in teaching style due to the implementation of the new curriculum, K13, "It pushes teachers to move away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom and towards a student-centered classroom. In real terms, this means that teachers should facilitate the learning process by asking guided questions that help students discover content for themselves and the students are expected to become active and engaged learners. It aims at stirring curiosity in students in order to build their critical-thinking and communication skills". So, the recent curriculum, K13, focuses on students/learners centered classroom while the result of this study shows the teacher-centered classroom interaction. Besides, from the data, it was also revealed that the classroom employed teacher-learner interaction since most of the teacher talk category used was *asking the questions* and most of the student talk categories used were *choral and individual responses to the teacher*. Meanwhile, *student with peer's response* to the teacher was only 0.17%, the least of all student talk categories. This means the teacher-learner interaction was found more frequent compared to learner-learner interaction. This pattern of interaction was found in the traditional classroom where the teacher only sits or stands behind a desk, and spends a large amount of time giving lectures and instructions whereas students' role are sitting, listening, and taking notes passively. Here, the teacher controls the topic for classroom talk, and determines when to start and stop talking in the classroom (Cazden, 1988; Tsui, 1995). However, based on the students' achievement (mid-term test result), it was indicated that the total average of their test result (39 students) was above the minimum passing criteria (MPC) which was 75. It means the students successfully achieved 82 for their class average score. To sum up, although the teacher dominated the classroom interaction and adopted teacher-learner interaction, the students were able to achieve higher score and above the MPC.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the result of the study, there are three conclusions which can be drawn. Those are as follows:

First, the highest percentage of communication contnts expressed by the teacher in the fifth grade EYL classroom interaction is *asking questions* (20.05%) as the indirect talk, and the lowest is *direct pattern drills* (0%) as the direct talk. It means more teacher's questions arouse more interactions and better answers given by the students. Besides, the indirect talk (34.89%) of teacher talk is greater than the direct one (23.47%). As the more frequently used talk in the teacher talk's category, indirect talk of the teacher talk causes more interactions since it expands the opportunity of the students to participate. Besides *asking questions*,

more intimate and informal relationship with the students are essential. They were built by asking the students' feelings or conditions, appreciating their hard works, and giving jokes. However, teacher's appreciations on the students' responses or works were not only given in the form of praising or encouraging but also in the form of using ideas of the students. This means the closer the relationship between the teacher and the students, the better the students absorb the materials from the teacher, and the faster the students acquire their target language.

Second, students' responses in the communication content were mostly found compared to other categories in student talk. The top three of the communication contents expressed by the students in the fifth grade EYL classroom interaction are *students' choral response to the teacher* (17.61%), *individual student response to the teacher* (13.27%), and *student's nonverbal behavior* (4.84%). Student *with peer's response to the teacher* (0.17%) was found as the least of all student talk categories. In Asian culture, there is a situation which is called the 'culture of silence' where the students are trapped in reticence, be unresponsive and avoid any interaction with the teacher. However, in this study, *silence* (0.74%) was found in the second rank from the bottom of student talk's category. So, young learners in Asia settings were able to participate actively if there were assistance and encouragement from the teacher and *asking question* is one of the example.

Third, the pattern of interaction that the writer found in this EYL class was teacher-learners interaction. This result was revealed since young learners are still beginners who have low English proficiency. Beyond that, young learners in this class still responded to the teachers actively since students' responses category took the highest proportion out of the total classroom interaction (student talk). On the other hand, the culture of *silence* which was mostly adopted by Asian students, took a small proportion out of the total classroom interaction (student talk). This was because young learners differ from adults in the process of their language achievements. To sum up, the latest curriculum, K13, focuses on students/learners centered classroom while the result of this study shows the teacher-centered classroom interaction. In other words, the expectation of K13 in this study was not yet fulfilled.

Based on the results, there are some suggestions given to both EYL teachers and future researchers. The teacher can create more interactive and communicative activities by having more group works and activities. Meanwhile, for the researchers, it is advisable to have more than five times observations. This study can give valuable contributions to English teachers by broadening their horizon about EYL classroom interaction.

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