

**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON CLASSROOM LANGUAGE USE:  
A STUDY AT SMA NEGERI 2 MATARAM**

M u k t i<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in implementing their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is important because it is the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive. The purposes of this study were to investigate the amount of English used in the EFL classroom and discuss the amount of teacher talk time and the impact of teacher talk time on students' participation in the classroom. Data for this study were purposively collected from observation and made the audio recording of the naturally occurring English classroom. Then, the data were transcribed by adopting Van Lier transcription system. In addition to the classroom recording, the data were also gathered through teacher interview and questionnaires for students. The results of the study showed that teachers involved in the study did not use English optimally in the classroom. Besides, they used teacher talk time excessively in the classroom that students had very limited time to practice using the target language. Therefore this study recommends that teachers should pay attention to their talk and talk time in order to increase students participation in the classroom.

**Keywords:** *Teacher talk (TT), students talk (ST), teacher talk time (TTT), student talk time (STT), language acquisition, second language (L2)*

## Abstrak

Ujaran guru sangat penting, tidak hanya untuk pengelolaan kelas namun juga untuk proses pemerolehan bahasa. Karena itu, ujaran guru penting bagi pengaturan dan pengelolaan kelas karena melalui bahasalah guru berhasil atau gagal dalam menerapkan rencana pembelajaran (RPP) mereka. Dalam hal pemerolehan bahasa, ujaran guru penting karena merupakan sumber utama input bahasa target yang diterima peserta didik. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui frekuensi penggunaan Bahasa Inggris yang digunakan di dalam kelas pelajaran Bahasa Inggris serta pengaruh waktu ujaran guru terhadap partisipasi siswa di kelas. Data untuk penelitian ini dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan merekam proses belajar mengajar di kelas bahasa Inggris. Kemudian, data ditranskripsikan dengan mengadopsi sistem transkripsi Van Lier. Selain rekaman di kelas, data juga dikumpulkan melalui wawancara guru dan pembagian kuesioner untuk siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini belum menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara optimal dalam pembelajaran di kelas. Selain itu, mereka menggunakan waktu ujaran secara berlebihan sehingga siswa memiliki waktu yang sangat terbatas untuk berlatih menggunakan bahasa target. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar guru memperhatikan waktu uajaran mereka agar bisa meningkatkan partisipasi aktif siswa di kelas.

**Kata kunci:** *ujaran guru, ujaran siswa, waktu ujaran guru, waktu ujaran siswa, pemerolehan bahasa, bahasa kedua (L2)*

## INTRODUCTION

Both learning and acquisition take place in the foreign language classroom. Learning is a conscious process, whereas acquisition helps the development of knowledge about the language in a spontaneous and unconscious way. The process of acquisition is particularly important in primary education as young learners do not yet have the levels of cognitive development to analyze the foreign language in the way that secondary and adult learners do. Situations which lead to the immersion of learners in the foreign language are of benefit in that they provide learners with an opportunity to understand language at a higher level than they may be able to produce. As the learners progress, they become more and more able to participate actively in the use of the language.

In Indonesia, the teaching of English has become increasingly important as a foreign language. English is the first foreign language that is officially taught to students and it is a compulsory subject to be taught for three years at Junior High Schools and for three years at Senior High Schools (Lauder, 2008). Furthermore, English also has been taught in Elementary Schools as an elective subject since the implementation of the 1994 Curriculum. As with other

subjects, the teaching of English language in Indonesia is expected to meet the curriculum objectives. The general standard objectives of English language teaching at Senior High Schools in Indonesia are stated as follows: (1) Developing communicative competence both in oral and in written in order to reach the level of informational literacy; (2) Raising awareness of the nature of English as a foreign language in order to compete with other countries in global community; and (3) Developing comprehension of students about the relation between language and culture (Depdiknas RI, 2006).

Ironically, there are still very limited numbers of students who are able to communicate in English, although they have been studying English for about six years. In this context, Thalal (2010) stated that there are many cases happen where students' expectations do not match with the reality of learning result showing that their English proficiency is still very low or no significant English ability after many years of study. Moreover, Riggensbach & Lazaraton (1991) state that students learning foreign language programs are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in the target language they learn.

In view of the above, an investigation to the causes of failure of teaching English

particularly in Senior High School in Indonesia needs to be conducted. One of the areas that needs to be investigated is the language used by the teacher in classroom, because classroom is a place where students are provided with considerable input, interactions of various kind, and opportunities to practice and use of language. The kind of language used by the teacher for instruction in the classroom is known as teacher talk (TT). As Nunan (1991) points out: "Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in implementing their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is important because it is the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive." The amount and type of teacher talk is even regarded as a decisive factor of success or failure in classroom teaching. (Hakansson, cited Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun, 2002). Teacher Talk (hereafter referred to as TT), Teacher Talking Time (hereafter referred to as TTT) and Students Talking Time (hereafter referred to as STT) are the focus of this study.

One of the methods in investigating students' involvement in the EFL classroom is by comparing the amount of TTT and STT. SST refers to the total amount of time students spend talking during a lesson, compared with the amount of time the teacher spends talking (BBC, 2008).

Based on my informational interview with senior English teachers and some students of SMA Negeri 2 Mataram, it shows that the average amount of TTT is about 70% and STT is about 20%. This ratio of percentage should be a problem for a second language acquisition. Nunan (1999) argues that active use of the target language (L2) by students is considered to be an integral part of the language acquisition process. An effective L2 classroom therefore, should provide an opportunity for students to contribute to learning activities and maximize their use of the target language (van Lier, 2001) by increasing STT. Therefore, the study entitled "**A Descriptive Study on Classroom Language Use: A Study at SMA Negeri 2 Mataram**" is considered to be important to conduct for two reasons. Firstly, investigating the classroom language use will show the proportion of teacher talk to that of 'real' communication by assessing teacher and student output (McCarthy, 1991). Secondly, the investigation of the nature of classroom discourse is of great

importance because it will mediate pedagogical decision making and the outcomes of language instruction.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In the past few decades, there has been an increasing interest in teacher's linguistic input during instruction (Cazden, 2001) and during classroom routines (Dickerson, 2005; Glazer & Burke, 1994). In the other word, studies of teacher talk are related to two language types. One is the investigation of language that teachers use in their language classrooms, and the other is the investigation of language that they use in subject matter lessons. In recent years there has been several studies reporting on the specificities of teacher talk and the role of it regarding EFL learners' language acquisition (Incecay, 2010). Kim and Suh (2004), for example, studied teacher talk in Korean English classroom. They analyzed recorded data from six middle school teachers in Busan. The results showed that teachers' talk accounted for about 60% of classroom discourse and teachers talked about 17 times a minute, which is 4.5 times more than the students' talk. The findings also indicated that teacher talk in the teacher fronted class was more than that in the student-centered classes.

I. In another similar research, Lin (2005) investigated whether there were

differences between the teachers' talk in monolingual and bilingual classrooms. The results of the study showed that there were significant differences between teachers' talk in both classes, such that teacher talk in monolingual class was more focused on content-area vocabulary and its function. The teacher also used all the participant organization types including teacher to student, teacher to class, choral repetition and self-repetition strategies. In addition, the teacher used limited and broad references in the class time. On the other hand, in the bilingual class, the teacher talk focused more on form rather than content and teacher talk contained more phonological cues for teaching vocabulary items. The teacher used more visual support and repetition and the range of reference was narrow and focused on routine exchanges. Moreover, the teacher used more instruction and procedural directives in the classroom.

Xiao-Yan (2006: 36) examined the amount of teacher talk in total class time and investigated its impact on foreign language learning of 80 Chinese students. The results of the study revealed that most of the class time was allocated to teacher talk 76% of the total class time. According to the learners of this study, this amount of teacher talk could change the atmosphere of the class because "most of the students like

to listen to teachers' instruction and view it as a good learning strategy. But they do not like teachers to explain everything to them." Nevertheless, most of the learners believed that teacher talk is the most useful source of learning inside the classroom and it has direct and positive effect on their learning.

In addition to the above studies, recent studies on teacher talk were conducted by Behtash and Azarnia (2015) and Poorebrahim (2015). Behtash and Azarnia did a research on "*Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and Student Talking Time (STT)*", a case study in an Iranian language school. The Iranian language schools claim to be the advocates of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology. However, reflecting on the present state of language teaching in Iran clarifies that language classrooms are not really communicative. This inconsistency has been attributed in part to the teachers' lack of awareness of classroom processes. Thus, for encouraging teachers to reflect on classroom processes, the study addressed teacher talk and more specifically teacher talk time (TTT). Four teachers of an Iranian language school were selected as the cases of the study. During five successive weeks, some intermediate level classes of these teachers were recorded. Eight out of sixty sessions were selected through systematic randomization and transcribed for the purpose of analysis.

The duration of teachers' and students' moves were measured in seconds. The findings revealed that, in investigated language classrooms, teachers talk a large proportion of class time that is almost 75% of the class time while student talk time (STT) comprised less than 20% of the class time. The findings of the study are in line with the literature reviewed on TTT which came to the conclusion that teacher talk usually comprises more than two-thirds of the class time. This study reveals that it is true that a major proportion of class time is taken up by teachers talking in front of the classroom (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). No matter what teaching strategies or methods a teacher uses, it is necessary to give directions, explain activities and check students' understanding (Richards & Schmidt, 1985). This clearly emphasizes the importance of teacher talk in language classrooms. As stated earlier that teacher talk is more important in language classroom than any other classroom since in this context the language being used by teacher is not only the means of acquiring new knowledge; it is also the goal of the study.

Poorebrahim (2015) conducted a study on "*Constructive or Obstructive Features of Teacher Talk in EFL Classes*". This study was aimed to investigate classroom discourse from the viewpoint of

the SEET (Self-evaluation of Teacher Talk) framework which has resource to conversation analysis as its underlying powerhouse. The study was exploring how teacher talk can lead to more learner involvement in EFL classes. It was carried out on advanced EFL classes in a private language school in Maragheh, Iran. The audio and video-taped classes were transcribed and analyzed based on pre-defined modes of the SEET framework with special focus on teacher talk. The results of the study indicated that confirmation checking, scaffolding, direct error correction, and content feedback constituted the constructive whereas teacher interruptions and turn completions made up the obstructive sides of teacher talk respectively.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The aim of this study was to explore teacher talk, teacher talk time and time features in the classroom. Therefore this study employed qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is characterized by exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

### **Population and Samples**

The population of this study consisted of teachers and students of SMA

Negeri 2 Mataram. There were approximately more than one hundred students. The subjects of the study were English teachers and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who had experienced in learning English for 3 (three) years at the Junior High School.

This study involved 3 (three) teachers and 30 (thirty) students of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade of SMA Negeri 2 Mataram. The selected students were of the same grade, therefore the participants in this study were regarded the same in terms of educational background.

### **Data Collection Methods**

This study employed three methods for collecting data, i.e. observation, interview and questionnaire.

Observation in this study was the main method of the data collection technique. The investigation was started with making an audio recording of naturally occurring English classroom interactions. These recordings were then carefully transcribed by adopting van Lier (1988b) and Johnson (1995) transcription system as cited in Walsh (2006: 116). The interview was conducted to the 3 (three) English teachers involved in the study.

While questionnaire questions were distributed to 30 students who were taken randomly as the samples for this study. The questions were in Bahasa Indonesia and the

students were asked to choose one of the options (completely agree, agree, neutral, disagree and completely disagree) that best represents how they feel about the use of English as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

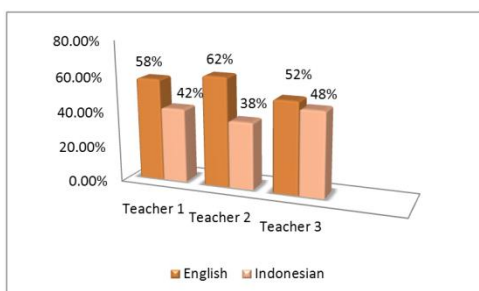
### Method of Data Analysis

The recorded data were carefully transcribed in accordance with specific conventions. Only the segments containing interactions between teachers and learners were identified and separated from the whole. Then, the data was described and analyzed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The use of English in the classroom

The percentage of the use of English in the classroom in this study has been

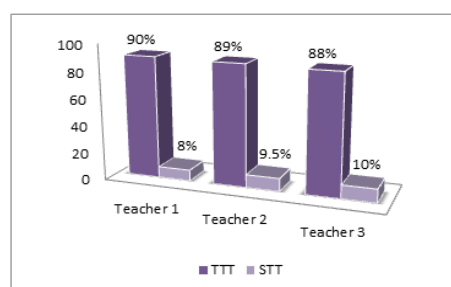


identified, i.e. 57%, 62% and 52% respectively. The percentage indicates that the teachers used English in the classroom around 55% on average. Table below gives a clear illustration on the frequency of English used by the teachers.

The use of English in the classroom by the teachers was not optimum yet, therefore it should be increased in order to give more second language exposure to the students.

Some recent reports of investigations into teachers' use of target language (for example Franklin, 1990 and Chambers, 1991) take their starting point the assumptions that medium of instruction in the language classroom should be the target language. In relation to the result of analysis of English used in the classroom which is around 55% on average, the study confirm that the teachings were not in line with the current theory supporting the idea that medium of instruction in the language classroom should be the target language (L2).

### Teacher Talk Time



The above graphic shows the high percentage of TTT leaving the STT (Student Talk Time) only 11 percent. The low STT indicated that students had very limited time to practice using the target language. The theory suggests that active use of the target language (L2) by the



students is considered to be an integral part of the language acquisition process (Nunan, 1999: 241). Therefore, teachers should make any attempts to increase STT and try to control his/her own talk time.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Having examined and discussed the findings on the teacher talk, frequency of language use in the classroom, teacher talk time, and teacher talk features, this study comes with the following conclusions:

1. The English language (L2) used in the classroom was still about fifty-fifty. Therefore, this amount should be increased and English should be used consistently in the classroom, because the active use of the target language by the students is considered to be an integral part of the language acquisition process. Therefore, English classroom should provide an environment in which students can contribute to learning activities and maximize their use of the target language.
2. Teacher Talk Time dominates the use of time in the classroom. Teacher talk time (TTT) within the EFL classroom has been critically evaluated in the process of endeavoring to increase students' L2 practice time. The

excessive use of TTT discourages students' motivation in learning the target language (English). When TTT is reduced, students have more chances to experiment with and personalize the language.

### **Suggestions**

1. It is very important that English teachers record his teaching session and do the conversation analysis so that he/she can analyze see the quality of his/her own classroom interaction.
2. A further study needs to be conducted by the teachers or students in the field of classroom discourse. The data collected in this study still can be used to study different aspects of the classroom discourse, such as the influence of teachers' education level to teaching learning outcomes, the impact of teacher talk to students' motivation, etc. Better understanding of the use of teachers' language can undoubtedly help teachers improve teaching and learning of the target language.

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