Lexical Features of Teacher Talk in English Classrooms in Senior High Schools

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Lexical Features of Teacher Talk in English Classrooms in Senior High Schools

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Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia has been taught since elementary schools. As the only setting for EFL learners to learn English formally, the students of Senior High Schools are in the 7th to 9th year in acquiring English as a foreign language. As non-native English teachers who has been teaching English for years, English teachers in Indonesia are supposed to be the source of language input for learners. This article explores lexical features of teacher talk as an input in EFL classrooms in 8th year of senior high schools of English language classrooms. Type token ratio and parts of speech as some particular modified input of teacher talk are used to see lexical density in English classrooms. This study was conducted by descriptive method with qualitative approach. The data of the present study were taken from classroom observations of 5 English teachers from 5 senior high schools which were equipped with audio recordings tool. The result revealed the variants of type token ratio among the teachers and lexical variety that teachers' oral input. The type-token ratio of teacher talk is less than or similar as 41% or ≤ 0.41, the mean of lexical density of teacher talk was 0.166 and proportion of the use of nouns and verbs are not more than 50% of teacher talk.

Keywords: teacher talk, lexical variation, lexical density

A. Introduction

In the process of teaching English as a foreign language, teacher plays various pivotal roles. As a primary foreign language to be learnt compulsorily in Indonesia since lower secondary school, teaching English must be a medium to deliver a foreign language to the students and make them able to utilize the language communicatively in classroom context. Since English has become a compulsary subject taught at a secondary school level in Indonesia, English language teachers are highly required to devote their efforts to make students master the English language. The English teachers are viewed to be the main model for students in the classroom as English is insufficiently exposed to students outside of the classroom. Being able to be a good foreign language model in the classroom, as Richards (2011) maintains, is a must for the English teachers in that they are the only ones the students can access ina foreign language learning.

Theories of second language acquisition have claimed that language input has a consistent positive effect in improving proficiency. These theories maintain that the input has to be comprehensible to the learner and modified through interactions. In vocabulary acquisition, the Input Hypothesis (Krashen 1981, 1982) has inspired studies of incidental vocabulary learning through reading and listening and analysis of teacher talk as oral input. This paper aims to investigate the lexical features as modified input of teacher talk to second year students of senior high schools. The lexical features are seen from the type-token ratio, lexical density and proportion of the use verbs and nouns.

B. Literature Review

English teachers in Indonesia mostly are not native speakers of English, therefore, they must provide comprehensible input in the classroom. In response to the significance of becoming language inputs to the process of language acquisition, Krashen (1982) states that learning a second language in the classroom setting subconsciously could promote language development. Teachers are key persons who have to convey knowledge, direct the students' behavior and instruct vocabulary in the classroom. In this regard, teachers' language competence and content mastery are absolutely imperative. The language employed by teachers in language classes is served as the source of input of language knowledge as well as used to instruct language communication and organize classroom activities. This is known as teacher talk (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982). It isthe term of language varieties used by English teachers when they are in the process of teaching.

As an attempt to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners (Richards, 1992: 471). The styles used by teacher in classroom context are in line with Ellis (2008) formulation about teacher talk. It is formulated that teacher talk can be divided into those that investigate the type of language teachers use in language classrooms and those that investigate the type of language they use in subject lessons.

Referring to those definitions, teacher talk in English classroom is regarded as one special variety of English language. It therefore has its own specific features which other varieties do not share. In addition, teacher talk is a special communicative activity aimed at communicating with students and developing students' foreign language

proficiency. In this respect, Cullen also (1998) identifies there are some characteristics of teacher talk that are communicative and non-communicative. Teachers are conducting instructions, cultivating their intellectual ability and managing classroom activities. The language the teachers use in the classroom determines whether a class will succeed or not. Many scholars have found teacher talk dominates around 70% of classroom language (Chaudron, 1988; Cook, 2000). Teachers pass on knowledge and skills, organize teaching activities and help students practice through teacher talk.

In English language classrooms, teachers' language is not only the object of the course, but also the medium to achieve teaching objective. Both the organization of the classroom and the goal of teaching are achieved through teacher talk. Nunan (1991) points out that teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also the processes of acquisition. Comprehensive input is the quality and quantity of exposure of the target language input for second language acquisition, any reduction of the TL would then be seen as a wasted opportunity for valuable input. Krashen and Terrell (1983) emphasize that learners acquire foreign language following the same path they acquire their L1.

Teacher talk plays an important role in classroom organization and management, giving feedback and asking questions. It is generally agreed that language input provided by teacher is vital in second classroom for language development (Patten, 2003; Ellis, 2005). In China, teacher talk dominated the foreign language classroom (Tang, 2009). This could be explained by some pragmatic reasons. First, the large amount of teacher talk in Chinese classrooms matched the expectations of teachers, learners, schools and even parents (Li, 1999). Second, teacher talk is a natural outcome of traditional teaching practice, large class sizes, and low linguistic competence of the learners. Third, the curriculum, to a great extent, encourages teacher-centeredness as it is the safest way of complying with the examination requirements and preparing students for the high stake public examinations. Thus, both the quantity and quality of teacher talk are valuable to learners as:

a) it provides a potentially valuable source for language input for acquisition.
b) it is unrealistic to reduce teacher talk time (TTT) as it is culturally inappropriate, where the classrooms are preoccupied with the traditional role of a teacher as knowledge-transmitter.
c) in an "input-poor" environment where the teacher is the principal source of lexical input, questions, nomination of topics, and interaction patterns initiated or shaped by the teacher affect exposure to the language.
d) the amount of input will affect the language learning outcomes (Mangubhai, 2005).

In a more recent study, Vidal (2003) studied first-year university EFL students on their academic listening of lectures as lexical input for vocabulary expansion. She found that listening to lectures resulted in vocabulary gain. Greater vocabulary gain was highly correlated with lecture comprehension, frequency of word occurrence, word elaborations and types of vocabulary. These studies threw light on type token ratio, lexical density and the dominant part of speech that were employed in teacher talk.

C. Research Methodology

In this study, the lexical features in the English language classrooms in Indonesia were examined. These lessons were all conducted by non-native English teachers. It aimed to find out how non-native English teachers provide lexical features in English language classrooms.

Five teachers with ten years and more of teaching experience from fivestate senior high schools were observedand recorded of their English teaching to students of second year of senior high schools.The subjects of this study were the exemplary English teachers of state senior high schools in Lamongan, East Java. The exemplary English teachers were selected from the data about qualified EFL teachers given by the Education department of Lamongan, the recommendation of English teacher superintendents, and some determined criteria. Those recommended English teachers by two authorized communities are believed to be the English teachers who meet the criteria of exemplary English teachers who demonstrate a high commitment to their profession, have the ability to take the initiative and to be innovative in inventing media of learning and must have professional ability to communicate clearly and pleasantly and facilitate learning process which involves planning effectively, establishing rules that are reasonable and not excessive in number, and arranging the classroom so that instructions go well (Anugerahwati: 2009, Ramadhani, Ancok, Swasono and Suryanto: 2010). Meanwhile, the determined criteria established by the researcher of the exemplary EFL teachers are as follows:

They must meet the standard academic qualification of undergraduate (*sarjana*) degree from English language Teaching (ELT) department mandated in the teacher law 14/2005 and Regulation of Minister of National Education 16/2007. They are certified teachers with more than ten years of teahing English at junior and senior high schools. Regarding teaching experiences, Huberman (1992 as cited in Garton and Richards, 2008) emphasizes that teachers with ten years teaching experiences have already been more in a stabilization teaching phase. This means that the teachers, in this period, have opened up their teaching skills because they allow themselves to make on-the-spot decisions in the classroom and explore aspects of their practice. In addition, the teachers have the confidence to think about the sort of things they intend to be and they rethink some of their key ideas and practices so that they are in a position to respond to new situations.

Those criteria meet the requirements of professional teachers in general that must possess the required competences to be fully qualified. Many teachers believe that good teachers are indicated by the amount of their teaching experience. While experienced teachers are not always better than less experienced teachers, the first are frequently more capable of managing their classrooms more effectively than the latter. In this respect, both novice and experienced teachers are required to have standard competence to be professional teachers. In connection with standard competence of teachers in Indonesia, the 14/2005 teacher law and the 19/2005 government regulation have defined the standard competences of teachers including subject-matter, pedagogical, personal and social competence.

Table 1. Profiles of Research Subjects

No	Teacher	Gender	Academic Qualifications	Teaching Experience	Current Position in *MGMP*
1	H	Female	S2 in ELT (*M.Pd*)	11 years	Official of *MGMP*
2	S	Male	S1 in ELT (*S.Pd*)	10 years	Member of *MGMP*
3	N	Male	S2 in ELT (*M.Pd*)	12 years	Secretary II of *MGMP*
4	M	Male	S2 in Indonesian Language (*M.Pd*)	27 years	Member of *MGMP*
5	P	Male	S2 in ELT (*M.Pd*)	16 years	Chair of *MGMP*

1. Classroom Observation

The main stage of the present study was conducted by doing a classroom observation. The observations were intended to gain the teacher talk features that were used in English classroom. The observation was intentionally commenced at the end of August.During the observations the researcher immerses herself in the community in the classroom. Non-participant observer is an outsider who sits on advantageous place to watch and record the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012: 215).

To complete the observation, the researcher employed the sequence-based talk in the note form of key events. It provides a summary of what the teacher talk during the lesson (Richard & Farrel, 2011). In order to make effective use of field notes, the researcher used observed the talk within the teaching stages which consist of *the opening*, *whilst teaching*, and *closing*. Every time the researcher identified a different sequence of talk, she wrote it in the field notes.

The researcher then joined the classes simply by following the EFL classroom schedules as provided by the teachers. She observed the English classroom once a week since the Curriculum 2013/*K*-13 provides only 2 times 45 minutes of English teaching for each level in Senior High School. Therefore the researcher followed the schedule of the teachers once a week during the data collecting sessions and she stopped observations when the data was saturated (Dornyei: 2007).

Yet, the researcher could only present 3 until 4 times for each teacher during the classroom observation time. It so occurred since the teachers sometimes were absent for personal reason or had to attend an official meeting out of town. In addition, the beginning of the semester was utilized for the series of Indonesian Independence Day celebration activities.

2. Recordings

The recordings were done to obtain the data of the teacher talk by an audio recorder and a handy camera to record teacher talk, non-verbal and contextual information. It provides a permanent record of spoken language (Graddol et al, 2000:36). During the classroom observation, the researcher was aided by an assistant who managed the visual recorder by using a handy camera. Both the researcher and the assistant were sitting at the back row seat and did not give any action to the classroom activities.

In obtaining clear recording of teachers' voice in classroom instructions, the researcher also utilized a digital SONY voice recorder with built-in USB ICD-PX440 which was placed in teacher's pocket during the classroom interaction. It recorded teacher's voice clearly as well as students' voice, either individually or in a choir. The tape was then transcribed as the main data source to answer the objectives of the study.

Type-token ratio (TTR) was measured by examining the vocabulary variation within a test or person's speech using the measure of lexical variation adopted by Meara, Lightbown and Halter (1997) and Brown, Sagers and LaPorte (1999) to assess the lexical richness of teacher talk.It is obtained by calculating the total number of different words divided by the number of total words. A high TTR shows a large amount of lexical variation and low TTR indicated relatively little lexical variation.

$$TTR = \frac{\text{no. of types} \times 100}{\text{no. of tokens}}$$

In this study, "types" were defined as all the different words in the corpus, and "tokens" as the total number of running words. "Type" was taken to include both the base form and all its derivations, despite any differences in orthography and pronunciation.

Lexical density is measuredby calculating number of lexical tokens divided by total number of tokens. Lexical tokens were examined by the total nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Total number of tokens are obtained by calculating all lexical items or tokens from all teachers.

D. Findings
1. Type Token Ratio

Table 2 below shows that the TTR of the five teachers varied greatly. The relatively TTR implies that the teacher talk was not lexically rich. In other words, the fact that the foreign language learners are exposed to an "input-poor" environment is further substantiated. Learners not only have scarce exposure to the L2 outside classroom, they also have limited extensive exposure to the target language inside the classroom as well. Table 2 shows the result of two meetings of classroom observation recordings.

Table 2. Type Token Ratio Of Individual Teacher

Teachers	Meeting	Tokens	Types	TTR
Teacher H	I	415	152	0.37
	II	230	114	0.50
Teacher M	I	1677	644	0.41
	II	1773	679	0.39
Teacher N	I	1617	531	0.38
	II	1514	553	0.44
Teacher P	I	2874	920	0.32
	II	3844	1188	0.30
Teacher S	I	639	259	0.47
	II	841	318	0.38

Table 2 shows that each teacher had varied tokens in every meeting. Each meeting durated 90 minutes. Teacher H produced more tokens in first meeting. By examining the number of tokens, there were not too many utterances she employed in her teacher talk. Teacher M produced almost similar number of tokens in two meetings. Teacher N also produced parallel number of tokens from two meetings. Teacher P seemed to produce somewhat different between first meeting and the second one. Meanwhile Teacher S produced hundreds of tokens in two meetings. From Table 2, it can be concluded that Teacher P produced the maximum tokens amongst five teachers.

In terms of number of types, Teacher H yielded the smallest number of word types in her second meeting and the maximum number of types was delivered by Teacher P in his second meeting. It seemed that the more tokens were produced, the higher number of word types. However, to examine type token ratio of each teacher, the numbers of token did not make a greater number of type token ratio. To make easier the type token ration from all meeting, see Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of TTR

Teacher	Token	Types	TTR
Teacher H	645	266	0.41
Teacher M	3450	1323	0.38
Teacher N	3131	1084	0.35
Teacher P	6718	2108	0.31
Teacher S	1480	577	0.39

Table 3 reveals that the value of lexical variation or type token ratio from 5 teachers are almost similar one another. Despite variant amount of tokens of 5 teachers, it seems that the higher amount of tokens do not automatically increase type token ratio. In another word, the type token ratio cannot only be seen by the tokens produced in teacher talk. Teacher H produced the least tokens among 5 teachers, yet, her type token ratio is the highest of all. It is due to the types of lexical variation she employed were more assorted and infrequently repetitive. It can be said, therefore, that the vocabulary is less produced by Teacher H does not lead a lower TTR. Moreover the amount of words possibly produced higher TTR if the tokens werein balanced proportion with types. Or, to put it another way, the value of TTR or lexical variety is not determined by the amount of the tokens the teacher produced in teacher talk. A high TTR indicates a large amount of lexical variation and a low TTR indicates relatively little lexical variation. The type-token ratio of teacher talk is less than or similar as 41% or ≤ 0.41.

2. Lexical Density

Lexical density is to measure the richness of written or spoken language. Lexical density is measured by calculating number of lexical tokens divided by total number of tokens. Lexical tokens were examined by the total nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Total number of tokens are obtained by calculating all lexical items or tokens from all teachers.

Table 4. Total of Lexical Items

No	Teacher	Types of lexical Items				Total Items
		N	Adj	V	Adv	
1	Teacher H	73	10	41	10	134
2	Teacher M	293	103	246	121	763
3	Teacher N	162	51	104	37	354
4	Teacher P	224	90	127	63	504
5	Teacher S	68	20	61	19	168

Table 4 reveals the amount of total lexical items which are obtained by the amount of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs from 2 meetings. In the following step, the lexical items are divided by total tokens produced by the teachers in their teacher talk.

Table 5. Table of Lexical Density

No	Teacher	Lexical items	Total words	Lexical density
1	Teacher H	134	645	0.21
2	Teacher M	763	3450	0.22
3	Teacher N	354	3158	0.11
4	Teacher P	504	6718	0.08
5	Teacher S	168	811	0.21

Table 5 reveals that lexical density of teacher talk ranged between 0.08 to 0.22. The lexical density is measured by calculation the content words that are formed by nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, are divided by total words. It can be seen from the amount of lexical items that Teacher M employed 763 from 3450 total words. Comparing to Teacher H who has the least amount of lexical items of all. Yet Teacher H has slightly smaller value of lexical density than Teacher M since the lexical density is determined by the amount of content words instead of the amount of words. Therefore a greater lexical items does not necessarily create a greater lexical density.

3. Proportion of Nouns and Verbs

As teacher talk is the way of foreign language exposure that encounters in classroom context, some adjustments occur are necessarily made. In contributing the lexical variations and density, the proportion of the use nouns and verbs are important to consider. The amount of those two types of words may distinguish whether the vocabularies used by the teachers matched with the level and proficiency of the students (Dodu, 2013). See table 6 for more details amount of nouns and verbs in teacher talk.

Table 6. Proportion of Nouns and Verbs

	Teacher H	**Teacher M**	**Teacher N**	**Teacher P**	**Teacher S**
Nouns	73 (9%)	293 (36%)	162 (20%)	224 (27%)	68 (8%)
Verbs	41 (7%)	246 (42%)	104 (18%)	127 (22%)	61 (11%)

Table 6 revealed that the use of nouns and verbs in teacher talk did not take dominant part of the teacher talk. It can be seen from the percentage of each category which was taken from two meetings of classroom observations. The results were obtained by calculating the total of nouns and verbs of out of total amount of each respectively. Teacher M talk produced the highest amount of both proportions of nouns and verbs.

E. Discussion

This study of lexical features focused on type token ratio, lexical density and proportion of the use of nouns and verbs of teacher talk. The analysis of teacher talk is done with the purpose of reflecting the reality of the classroom and suggesting appropriate and attainable models for language teachers to follow within the classroom context on the other hand. The measure of TTR, LD and proportions of the use of nouns and verbs suggest that English classrooms contexts in Indonesia have something in common in terms of lexical features. Teacher talk provides some sort of lexical environment for acquisition, but it is not a rich one.

As Krashen (1982) asserted, the more the communication in the classroom environment is approximated to the real world, the greater the extent of acquisition. In other words, the best lexical environment is a virtual representation of the natural language setting. However, the language that the teachers used was "caretaker" language and the interaction was limited to display questions only. Learners had no opportunities to negotiate meaning. The EFL classroom is not an "acquisition-rich" setting at all and input from teachers is not the best kind of lexical input for acquisition. The classroom does not provide an environment for natural exposure. It is an artificial one, with the special features of classroom language. Teachers use simple language and vocabulary. The choice of words is also restricted because of the limited functions that could possibly take place in the classroom.

One way to deal with the issue of the impoverished lexical environment in the classrooms observed in this study is to see the vocabulary instructions and lexical environment as problems and approach them with the need for change and innovation. In order to improve the lexical environment, it is necessary to expand the topics, vary the teaching skills and enrich the interaction. Bowers (1980 quoted in Malamah-Thomas 1987) listed six contexts for verbal behaviour of the teacher in the classroom. They are: questioning/eliciting; responding to learners" contributions; presenting/explaining; organizing/giving instructions; evaluating/correcting; socialising/establishing and maintaining classroom rapport. These contexts are not new to any teachers but the potential of allowing teachers to create more lexical input should not be ignored. Attempts to negotiate meaning with learners and create opportunities for learners to interrupt can open more opportunities to wider lexical

variety. A richer lexical environment requires conscious effort from the teachers to allow more teacher-learner interaction, more topics nominated by the teachers or learners and more spontaneous exchanges. Observation of classroom activities and occurrences of "high-level" words in the data suggests that only when teachers use the target language more often, explaining words with elaboration, and interacting with learners, can a rich and varied lexical environment be created. Laufer & Hulstijin (2001) stressed the importance of devising learning tasks to induce more involvement load for successful incidental vocabulary learning. According to Laufer & Hutstijin (2001), teacher should design learning task which can induce different combination of the involvement factors "needs", "search" and "evaluation" for each word. The more factors involved in one word, the greater involvement load they generate and better retention can be achieved. Kasper (2001) insisted that language socialization is an integrate part of second/foreign language teaching. However, it relies on teachers" cultural, pragmatic and interactional expertise in the language. When no or minimal interaction is allowed in the class, the number of words and the types of words from teachers will have a significant impact on vocabulary acquisition.

To create a rich lexical environment, one of the major issues is the choice of language. The foreign language classroom led by non-native or indigenous English teachers tends to adopt mother tongue to improve the efficiency of teaching. The reliance on L1 impedes a rich lexical environment for incidental acquisition and teacher talk lacks variety and high-level words. Their speech, under appropriate conditions of comprehensible input, could promote incidental vocabulary acquisition. However, this does not seem to be a major concern of teachers. Their mindset remains on helping the learners to acquire the glossed words in the textbooks to meet the vocabulary requirements in the mandatory national examination. The mindset of helping learners to learn most words within the limited class time through L1 also fails to allow learners to "notice" the features of L2 input for successfully language learning. The potential of the teacher as a source of lexical input is overlooked.

The data have also shown that the L1 was used not only for explaining vocabulary items but also as a medium to communicate with the learners. The heavy reliance on L1 can be regarded as an indication of lack of variety of teaching methods or teaching skills. It can be an alarming signal of the lack of proficiency of the teacher and of inadequate training. It is also worth developing the reflective thinking ability of the teacher to raise the quality and not just the quantity of teacher talk. Teachers can build on redundancy in L2 and use less L1 while explaining the words. They can critically analyze their taped lessons to raise their awareness of the use of lexis, the vocabulary teaching methods and the language use in the classroom. They can make a list of teaching strategies which enable more oral lexical input but not necessarily reduce the learners" output and their chance of participation. Teacher talk could also be introduced to the teacher training program to establish a solid and sound knowledge and ability to enrich the quality of their speech for a rich lexical environment. To regulate the input-poor environment, there is a need to expand the exposure to the target language. Setting up English corner at school, data bank of vocabulary on the web, electronic English books can all be helpful to allow more intentional or incidental learning.

F. Conclusions

Overall, as explained previously it can be notified that the teachers produced a big amount of lexical items in their teacher talk yet it did not automatically associate with a big amount of lexical density. However, we also see a high potential of teacher talk as lexical input. A rich lexical inputs may derive from the result that revealed the variants of type token ratio among the teachers and lexical variety that teachers' oral input. The type-token ratio of teacher talk is less than or similar as 41% or ≤ 0.41, the mean of lexical density of teacher talk was 0.166 and proportion of the use of nouns and verbs are not more than 50% of teacher talk.

It has to be stressed that it is not the intention of this paper to evaluate the non-native or indigenous English teachers. On the contrary, this is an attempt to value the contributions of this large labour force who are instructing probably the greatest number of English learners in the world to recognize the quality of their teacher talk in English classrooms.

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