

## TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: NATIVE-LIKE OR MODIFIED INPUT?

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**Abstract:** In this era of technology, English is used in almost every aspect of human life. Such phenomenon eventually results in high demand for early English instruction from many Indonesian parents for their children. In response to that, some elementary schools in Indonesia have started to implement English as the local content subject despite the fact that the government has issued a new policy to end the teaching of English in elementary school. However, learning English in an EFL context is difficult due to the absence of language environment which is the source of language input for its learners. Therefore, some schools create language environment by holding an immersion program. In such a program, English is used as the only medium of instruction despite the students' low English competence. Teacher Talk, thus, becomes very important language inputs. In using Teacher Talk, teachers have to know how to use it effectively. However, there have been only a few studies focusing on the use of Teacher Talk for young learners, especially in immersion programs. Thus, the current study aims to investigate how English is modified into Teacher Talk to be made as comprehensible input for the first-grade students of International Class Program (ICP).<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** Teacher Talk, International Class Program, Immersion Program, English for Young Learners

### INTRODUCTION

In this era of technology, English is used in almost every aspect of human life. The way people learn English has also shifted from classroom learning to self-directed learning with the help of the Internet to provide more authentic materials and learning flexibility. Despite the flexibility, learning English in an EFL context tends to be difficult due to the absence of language environment which is the source of language input for its learners. Moreover, one aspect which technology fails to provide for language learners is the role of teachers. Teachers can provide deeper explanations, direct feedbacks, and chances for learners to practice the language in real-life interaction (Chu, 2011; Zahrabi & Ehsani, 2014; Brown & Lee, 2015; Bajrami, 2015). In addition, teachers tend to provide more comprehensible language input for the learners by modifying the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2001:94). By limiting teacher's role, English learning can be ineffective (Bajrami, 2015). Such occurrence eventually results in high demand for early English instruction from Indonesian parents especially after the government issued a new policy to end the teaching of English instruction in elementary school. Therefore, some private elementary schools in Indonesia have taken a great measure by implementing an immersion program in their schools to prepare the young learners for the higher level of education and facing the globalization era. In implementing an immersion program, these schools employ the use of English as the Medium of Instruction (MoI) in their instruction which starts from the first grade since children tend to gain more advantage in learning English through naturalistic English

learning context (Saville-Troike, 2006). Brown and Lee (2015:58) also suggested that immersion classes which employ English as the Mol have a greater chance of creating successful learners.

Early learning can also encourage the learners to have a great possibility to produce the language near native-like due to the children’s “brain plasticity” compared to adult learners (Saville-Troike, 2006:84). However, early English learning in an immersion program in the EFL context means that the learners have almost zero English competence since they have not been exposed much to the language from a formal setting. The learners’ knowledge on English language concepts and new vocabularies of both English and non-English subjects are very limited, making them “highly dependent on the teachers for models of language” (Brown & Lee, 2015). As a result, some may doubt the effectiveness of the immersion program due to the varied competencies of the students in the class. Due to such a reason, these schools have to do a selection test for the students prior to entering the program. However, such a selection test does not always guarantee that the students have good English competence. Nevertheless, the students’ knowledge of the English language in the class is still varied and limited, making them dependent on the teacher as their main source of language input in the classroom.

In providing language input for EFL learners, most teachers employ the use of Teacher Talk. Teacher Talk can be defined as the language employed to guide learners in a subject lesson (Ellis, 1985). Teacher Talk also includes providing directions and explanations about a certain task and checking the learners’ comprehension on the subject (Sinclair & Brazil, 1982; Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010). Teacher Talk is mostly adjusted to adapt to the learners’ level of comprehension to establish classroom interaction between teachers and learners (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010; Jouibar & Afgari, 2015). However, many teachers are reluctant to use various features of Teacher Talk in their classroom that they unintentionally tend to stick to certain uses of Teacher Talk (Lyster and Ranta’s (1997, in Lightbown & Spada, 2001) whilst some other are still unaware of the Teacher Talk use in their own class (Ellis, 2003). Such events may occur due to the lack of teachers’ background knowledge regarding the various features of Teacher Talk and their importance. In Indonesia where English is regarded as a foreign language, it is almost impossible for teachers to implement a full-English lesson in the classroom due to the various types of learners with various English competences. Such context will definitely result in a different use of Teacher Talk in the instructional process.

There had been many studies conducted on the use of Teacher Talk for students of higher level education in Indonesia, yet only a few studies focusing on the use of Teacher Talk for young learners especially in immersion programs. Such an event makes it a bit difficult to find the information needed on how to teach English in immersion programs to young learners in Indonesia effectively. Due to these reasons, it is interesting to investigate how teachers of immersion classes make their talk comprehensible for young learners in an EFL context. Thus, reflecting on the background of study and considering how Teacher Talk plays a role in young learners’ second language acquisition and development, the current study attempted to answer the main research question: “How English is modified into Teacher Talk to be made as comprehensible input for the first grade students in an English class of International Class Program?”. The main research question is broken down into three sub-questions:

- a) What features and modifications of Teacher Talk used during the instructional process?
- b) When do features and modifications used in the class?
- c) How is the distribution of both features and modifications of Teacher Talk during instructional processes?

## METHOD

The current study implemented the descriptive qualitative method as it aimed to describe and analyses the research subjects without intercepting them in their natural setting. The study employed Miles and Huberman's (1994) stages in treating qualitative research data, namely, data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusion. The study took place in SD Laboratorium UM, located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The subject of the study was an English teacher who was responsible to be the homeroom teacher of a first grade International Class Program (ICP). The observation was conducted in the 1B - ICP class in the second semester with 27 students, 10 males and 17 females.

This study focused on the features and modifications of Teacher instructional process in the classroom, specifically in delivering the concepts of the language, feedbacks towards the students and establishing interaction between the teacher and the learners of the first grade. The focus of the study was to see the frequency of occurrence of certain features and modifications employed. The features of Teacher Talk only covered the functional features such as Teacher Talk as questions, corrective feedbacks, and teacher assessments (encouragement and confirmation), each was adapted consecutively from Richards and Lockhart (1996), Lyster and Ranta (1997, in Lightbown and Spada, 2001) and Xiao-Yan (2006). The modifications of Teacher Talk included: a slower rate of speech, pauses, simplified and exaggerated, basic and adjusted vocabulary, the slower degree of subordination, the use of declarative and statements instead of questions, and frequent self-repetition (Chaudron, 1988: 85). The data collection was conducted from February to May 2018. To obtain rich explanations and clarifications from the teacher, classroom observation and in-depth interview were conducted.

The researcher acted as an observer during the teaching and learning process when the teacher carried out her lessons in the class. The researcher made the observation checklists herself by modifying and adapting Yanfen and Yuqin's (2010) framework of Teacher Talk distribution. There were two observation checklists employed in the current study, a checklist for Teacher Talk features and for Teacher Talk modifications. The features of Teacher Talk (questioning, corrective feedback, and assessment) had different codes for each. For the questioning, the types of questions used were coded under procedural questions (Pro), convergent (Con) and divergent questions (Div). For the types of Teacher Corrective Feedback, they were given codes such as Explicit correction (EC), recasts (R), clarification requests (CQ), metalinguistic feedback (MF), and elicitation (E). Meanwhile, teacher's assessment was coded under confirmation (cf) and encouragement (enc).

**Table 2.1 The checklist for Teacher Talk Features**

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHER TALK FEATURES												
<b>Meeting</b> : 1 (One)												
<b>Day/Date</b> : Day, dd/mm/yyyy												
<b>Time</b> :												
<b>Subject</b> : English												
<b>Topic</b> :												
N O	INTERACT-ION	CLASSROOM DISCOURSE	FEATURES OF TEACHER TALK									
			Questions			Corrective Feedback				Assess-ment		
			Pro	Con	Div	EC	Re	CQ	MF	E	CF	Enc
1	Initiation (opening phase)	Questioning										
		Invitation										
		Direction										
2	Business Phase (Follow up) and closing	Informing										
		Prompting										
		Encouragement										
		Criticizing										
		Ignoring										
		Acknowledgement										
		Comment										

Meanwhile, the Teacher Talk modifications checklist, aside from Chaudron’s (1988) seven modifications of Teacher Talk also included the use of the first language since the teacher employed the use of students’ L1 through code-mixing and code-switching in the class. Chaudron’ (1988) seven modifications were coded at a slower rate of speech (Slo), pauses—longer and more frequent halts in speech (P), simplified and exaggerated (Sim), basic and adjusted vocabulary (SimV), slower degree of subordination (Sub), the use of declarative and statements instead of questions (Stat) and self-repetition (Rep). Meanwhile, the code switching and code mixing appeared during the observations were coded under (FL) which stands for the first language. The observation checklist is displayed below.

**Table 2.2 The Checklist for Teacher Talk Modifications**

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHER TALK MODIFICATIONS												
<b>Meeting</b> : 1 (One)												
<b>Day/Date</b> : Day, dd/mm/yyyy												
<b>Time</b> :												
<b>Subject</b> : English												
<b>Topic</b> :												
N O	INTERACT-ION	CLASSROOM DISCOURSE	MODIFICATIONS								TRANSCRI-PTION	
			Slo	P	Sim	SimV	Sub	Stat	Rep	FL		
1	Initiation (opening phase)	Questioning										
		Invitation										
		Direction										
2	Business Phase (Follow up) and closing	Informing										
		Prompting										
		Encouragement										
		Criticizing										
		Ignoring										
		Acknowledgement										
		Comment										

As for the data collection, they were analyzed using the content analysis technique in which the collected data were transcribed, labeled and classified in accordance with the clusters. The data, then, were put in tables so that conclusion can be drawn. Afterward, the conclusion is verified by doing a triangulation of the data collected from observations, interview, and field note to draw the final conclusion which answered the research questions.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Frequently Used Teacher Talk Features and Its Implications

From the following table, it can be perceived that the most frequently used feature of Teacher Talk in the class was in the form of questions (66.6%) which made up more than halves of the classroom interactions. This finding supported Brown and Lee’s (2015:262) statement that the uses of questions in the classroom serve as an essential means to establish classroom interaction especially in the second language classroom.

**Table 3.1 The Frequency of Teacher Talk Features in English Class** CONFERENCE

Features of Teacher Talk	Features of Teacher Talk	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	SUM	(%)
Questions	Procedural Question	13	8	7	14	10	12	64	17.9%
	Convergent Question	44	18	23	25	15	34	159	44.5%
	Divergent Question	4	3	2	3	1	2	15	4.2%
Corrective feedbacks	Explicit Correction	3	1	1	0	0	1	6	1.6%
	Recasts	2	1	1	3	3	0	10	2.8%
	Clarification Request	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.3%
	Metalinguistic Feedback	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.3%
	Elicitation	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.3%
Assessment	Confirmation	4	6	3	13	11	12	49	13.7%
	Encouragement	13	6	12	4	4	12	51	14.4%
<b>Total</b>								357	100%

**M = Classroom meeting**

Moreover, the type of question which appeared most in the class was the convergent question (44.5%) which was supported by Richards and Lockhart’s (1996) statement that according to their observations, most teachers tend to employ convergent questions instead of divergent ones in the classroom. In the current study, the teacher claimed that the use of convergent questions was able to help the students to be active in the classroom. The teacher also said that it was a natural gesture to ask questions to the students to initiate classroom instructions since the students were not ready to initiate any communication in English themselves due to their minimum knowledge of English. In this case, the teachers had taken a good measure in teaching the language to the students.

(The use of a convergent question in the class)

T: “Do you still remember about Capital letter?”

SS: “Yes”

Despite the lowest usage of display question, according to Meng, et al. (2012), the use of display questions in the classroom, especially for young learners, can actually help them to get invested in the lesson and can encourage early language production.

(The use of a divergent question in the class)

T: “Yes, that’s a picture of a cat. Anyone here has a cat?”

S: “Uh, uh, teacher.” (raised their hands whilst calling the teacher)

T: "Yes, Hani. What color is your cat?"  
 S: "Yellow."

Procedural questions also contributed to the language development of the students since the International Class Program (ICP) is considered as a communicative instructional setting. Lightbown and Spada (2001:92) stated that in such a setting, how the students respond towards the classroom instruction indicates the students' success in learning the target language. In the current study, the teacher tended to use procedural questions to ask the students about their routines or to manage the classroom and the students would respond by doing whatever instructed.

(The use of a procedural question in the class)  
 T: "Okay, can you listen to me, everyone?"  
 S: (making a lot of noises, ignoring the teacher)  
 T: "Can you hear? Your table is clean. Nothing. Nothing on the table."

### The Frequency of Teacher Talk Modifications and Its Implication

All modifications of Teacher Talk appeared during the observations in the English class. It can also be perceived that the First language use was the most frequently used modification which made up 22.8% of the classroom talk whilst declarative statements made up 19.2% of the classroom interaction during the observations.

**Table 3.2 The Frequency of Teacher Talk Modifications in English Class**

Modifications of Teacher Talk	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	SUM	(%)
Slower Rate of Speech	23	9	13	14	9	24	92	13.5%
Pauses	5	1	5	11	3	3	28	4.1%
Exaggerated and Simplified Pronunciation	6	0	13	4	4	5	32	4.7%
Simplified Vocabulary	4	5	19	22	13	13	76	11.3%
Slower Degree of Subordination	17	5	12	12	14	13	73	10.7%
Declarative statements	24	11	27	27	16	27	132	19.4%
Self-Repetition	23	7	12	16	14	19	91	13.4%
First Language Use	27	29	10	23	21	45	155	22.8%
							<b>Total</b> 679	100%

**M = Classroom meeting**

However, the result does not imply that the use of the first language dominated the classroom interaction since 87.2% of the class interaction was done in English. In using the first language, the English teacher tended to use them for giving information and instructions, telling the students to do something and even criticizing them. Code-mixing and code-switching were mostly used in this modification.

In the class, the uses of the declarative sentence were perceived to be quite high. The high number of declarative sentence use indicates that the teacher employed more statements than questions in their classroom instruction. In this case, the teacher was the one being the active speakers in the class by giving instructions and information which did not require the students to respond verbally. The use of declarative sentences also supports the theory of the necessity of having a silent period in the classroom. Saville-Troike (2006:20) also stated that as long as there is language input, a reciprocal interaction in L2 learning is

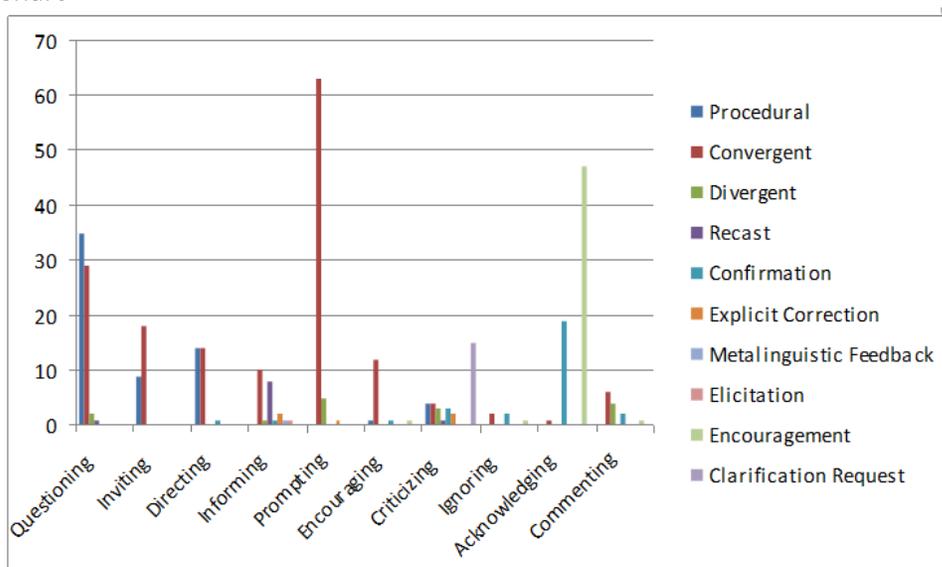
not really a necessary condition for the learners to be able to have a high level of L2 competence.

Despite this finding, the teacher still employed questions by modifying them into sentences such as removing the *wh-* and *do-* insertion auxiliary in their questions. Such modifications were used to make it easier for the students to comprehend the questions. Furthermore, the teacher also realized that the students' problems were related to the speed and simplicity of the instructions given by the teacher. Therefore, a slower rate of speech was often employed because the students' cognitive skills were still developing and adapting to the language.

### Teacher Talk and Classroom Discourse Distributions

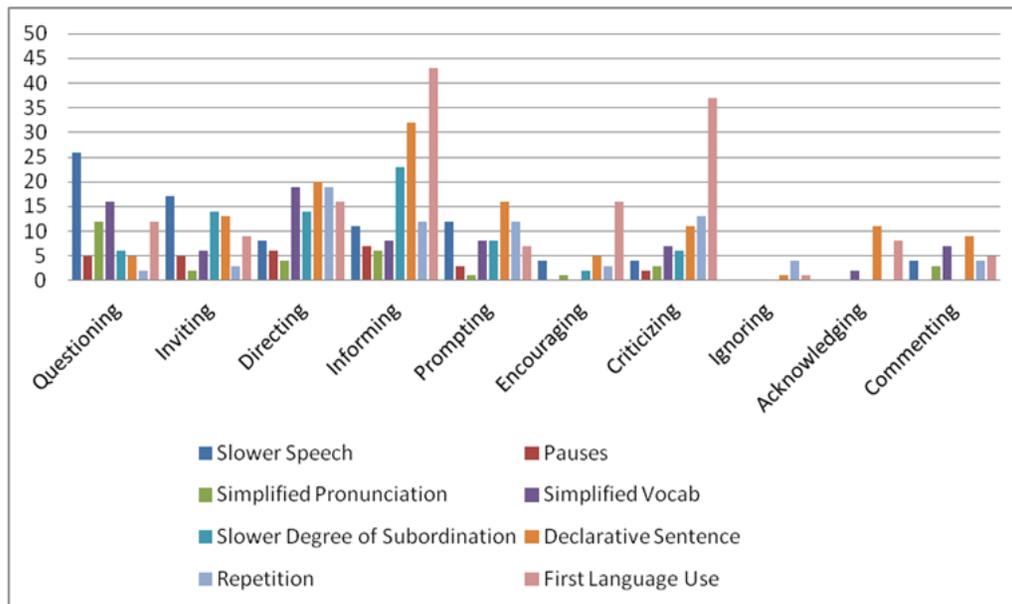
There were ten classroom discourses employed in this study which were adapted from Yanfen and Yuqin's (2010) study, namely: questioning, inviting, directing, informing, promoting, encouraging, criticizing, ignoring, acknowledging and commenting. Each classroom discourse served as different purpose. In the current study, it was revealed that these classroom discourses indeed appeared during the class observations in the class although the appearance of each discourse was not completely similar to Yanfen and Yuqin's result. From the ten classroom discourses, it can be perceived from the chart below that the convergent question appeared in all classroom discourses, and it is most frequently used during prompting discourse.

Figure 3.3 The Frequency of Teacher Talk Feature in the Classroom discourse of English Class in a Chart



Meanwhile, from chart 3.4, it can be perceived that the use of the first language appeared in all ten discourses. Meanwhile, a slower rate of speech and exaggerated pronunciation appeared in 8 discourses except in ignoring and acknowledging discourses. The teacher claimed that she employed slower rate of speech mostly in questioning (26 points) and inviting discourse (17 points) to make the language input comprehensible for the students so that they would be familiar with such questions and instructions.

Figure 3.4 The Frequency of Teacher Talk Feature in the Classroom discourse of English Class in a Chart



### Non-Native Speaker Teachers (NNST) and Their Implications in International Class Program

Many Indonesian parents still believe native speaker teachers (NSTs) gives better learning results. However, Brown and Lee (2015: 165) opposed to such idea by stating that non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs) have more advantages in teaching English to local students. For instance, the NNSTs have the ability to simplify the L2 into a more comprehensible input since they have gone through the same process as the students in learning the language. In the current study, the teacher employed code switching when she thought the classroom instructions were too complicated for the students to handle. Code mixing was used whenever they were unable to find the equivalent word in English. According to Harding and Riley (1986) and Ansar (2017), code switching and code mixing are able to become good strategies to develop the students' language competence and improve conversations by making the sentences clearer. Zhao and Macaro (2016) also stated the implementation of L1 use in immersion class yielded better vocabulary gains amongst the students compared to L2-only explanations. The English teacher claimed that the use of L1 in the international class program was also done in some discourses, such as criticizing and commenting discourse. In such discourse, teachers tend to employ abstract words which were considered too difficult for the students to comprehend if it was spoken in English.

### CONCLUSIONS

These results show that in teaching English to young learners in immersion programs, teachers are still considered as the most valuable source of language input for the students. The use of Teacher Talk in the form of questions from the teacher served as authentic examples of the target language as well as encouragement for the students to produce the language. Moreover, the use of Teacher Talk modifications in the form of declarative sentences appeared to be a good way to make the language input comprehensible for the students. The students tended to respond to the teacher's instructions better when the

Teacher Talks were slower, shorter and in the form of statements. Furthermore, the use of students' first language was also important in teaching them new vocabulary despite the students' status being in an immersion classroom.

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