The Effect of In-service English Teachers' Talk on Pre-Service English Teachers: A Case Study in Yangtze Normal University

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Abstract

The purpose of this present research was to analyze and compare the features of in-service English teacher's talk and that of pre-service English teachers' talk in class. To what extent did in-service English teachers hinder or facilitate pre-service English teachers' contributions by their use of language? It has found that in-service English teachers' talk in class lacks authenticity and improper echo (frequently use of "ok") or the improper time of echo students' answer would decrease pre-service teachers' involvement. While their ways to error correction and content feedback could facilitate pre-service teachers' involvement in class. It has suggested improving their teaching methodologies to make pre-service teachers have better performance in their internship class.

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1. Introduction

Teacher talk refers to the language used in the process of teaching by the teacher in class. Based on the research findings of caretaker speech in first language development [24] and foreigner talk [9], Rod Ellis points out TT addressed to L2 learners share its own unique formal and linguistic characteristics because of the particular physical setting, participants and teaching goals[8]. For second language teaching, it is a means through which the teaching content is delivered, and it is "the major source of comprehensible target language input that the learner is likely to receive" [21].

Pre-service English teachers refer to the students who get the pre-service teacher training in university and will be English teachers in high, middle or primary schools after graduation. The

pre-service training in university plays a crucial role in their future professional development because they shoulder the same responsibilities in their future careers as their university teachers do, so in-service English teachers' talk in class has a significant influence on that of pre-service English teachers. Although many researchers have focused on the TT of in-service English teachers, little attention has been paid to the TT of pre-service English teachers and the influence of the TT of in-service English teachers on pre-service English teachers.

The purpose of this present research is to analyze and compare the features of in-service English teacher's talk and that of pre-service English teachers' talk in class. To what extent do in-service English teachers hinder or facilitate pre-service English teachers' contributions by their use of language?

Therefore, this research is of great practical and theoretical significance. From the perspective of theory, the usage of the teacher's professional language can be shown and elaborated, from which the further linguistic research can be promoted; from the perspective of practice, teachers' language usage ability can be enhanced, which can help their students improve their language proficiency.

2. Literature Review

2.1　Research in western countries

In the 1970s, the study on teacher's language has emerged [10]. In the 1980s, considerable attention has been attached to the description and understanding of foreign language class research methods again, which exposed the problems in the process of language acquisition more directly and revealed the significance of classroom interaction[2]. In the 1990s, more empirical studies on language features of teacher talk such as speech, speed, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse have been explored. The importance of effective input of teacher talk and classroom interaction have been emphasized which may guide students to take an active part in all kinds of class activities to promote language acquisition through communication and meaning negotiation [14]. In the 2010s, researchers started to research teacher talk's quality and quantity within the framework of the communicative approach from different language levels [19],[20],[22].

The research in western countries also can be categorized into three groups. Firstly, research on quantity. Some western scholars, such as Bellack et al. and Dunkin and Biddle focused on the study on the quantity of teacher talk; it is found that the time of teacher talk accounts for high ratio in classroom discourse which is up to 70%. However, these researches just revealed the quantity and distribution of teacher talk without taking some factors such as teachers, courses, and learners into consideration[3],[6].

Second, research on the purpose and functions of oral discourse in the classroom. This can be classified as explain, control, asking questions, feedback, etc. It has be found that the different levels of teaching contents and teaching objects lead to the different ratio of function of teacher talk which is 23.7% for explaining, 17.6% for question and 15.8% for control. However, the findings from this research area are just different data in the context of language learning without a full report of the raw data. Thus, it is hard to do the effective comparison and evaluation of the teacher's classroom behavior through these data. Third, research on comprehensible input of teacher talk. It could be assumed that one of the main modifications that teachers make to their speech is that of delivery rate. It could be argued that a lower speech rate would increase the amount of comprehensible input available to students. Some research indicates that the delivery rate is slower in L2 classrooms [4]. Meanwhile, it is shown that native language teachers do more speed modification than non-native language teachers do. There is another argument that in order to increase the amount of comprehensible input, words modification of teacher talk may work. It has been found that both native and non-native language teachers in second language

learning classroom tend to use more basic, simple words for learners to understand. Neutral words and concrete proper nouns are the priorities for the teacher talk, and indefinite pronouns and terminologies are rarely used[5],[12].

2.2   Research in China

Till the 1990s, Chinese scholars began to research teacher talk from different angles in different levels; it can be summarized into the following groups:

2.2.1 The research on teacher talk and second language acquisition

Domestic classroom discourse analysis mainly focuses on the teacher talk in English class. In the language class, language is a tool of communication between teachers and students and also is the target language for students to learn, so the classroom discourse and SLA become the focus of discourse analysis which is of great teaching significance [1].

2.2.2 The research on teacher talk and pedagogy

The voice of teachers and students in class is the key concern with regard to the pedagogy; some issues such as the approach to realize the dialogue between teachers and course text are investigated [28].

2.2.3 The microcosmic research on teacher talk

Many scholars began to have an in-depth discussion of some specific field of teacher talk. For example, the research object focuses on teacher talk in an intensive reading class, oral English class, and extensive reading class. In addition, other fields such as question strategy , markup language , body language, and the influence of gender differences on English classroom discourse have been investigated[29].

2.2.4 The comparative research on teacher talk

The comparative analysis of teacher talks between western teachers and Chinese teachers, and between domestic teachers have been the heated issue for scholars to concern. However, most of the comparative studies are derived from the material of one class, and the effect of variables such as teaching content on teacher talk has not been taken into consideration[26].

The research in recent years emphasized the quantity and types of teacher talk, the role of teacher talk in language learning, teacher questions, feedback, error correction, and so forth. Wang points out the importance of teacher talk for learners' language output in foreign language teaching. There is a big difference between teacher talk in foreign language teaching class and that in other teaching classes in that teacher talk is not only a medium for teaching but also a purpose for learning[26]. Zhou&Zhou did a quantitative survey on the three stages of teacher talk in student-centered teaching model class, which include the quantity of teacher talk, different forms of feedback and auxiliary evaluation of class feedback form[28]. Hu discusses the functions and characteristics of teacher talk and holds the belief that teachers still play a dominant role even in the popular trend of "student-centered" context. Xu analyses the polite diction used by teachers in a foreign language class. He discusses the cognitive thinking orientation of teacher talk in primary and secondary school. Tang &Liu   analyzes the function of teacher language in terms of pragmatics. Hu advocates the techniques, contents, and forms of questioning[29].

Liu made a case study on discourse communication in oral English classroom and systematically analyzed discourse forms and language output of teachers and students, the type and length of statement between teachers and students, the quantity and ratio of turn-taking between teachers and students, the type, number and function of code-switching between teachers and students, as well as the features of the distribution and relations of the discourse power in classroom context. It is advisable that teacher should give students more chance to use the target language in class and let students enjoy more autonomous right to control turn-taking, so as to improve students' quality and quantity of oral English output[27].

Li points out that the inequality of power between teachers and students exist with regard to the polite aspect of teacher talk, which arouse the awareness that teachers should use polite words as much as possible to communicate with students[15]. Zeng and Zhou reveal that the second language acquisition can be to some extent promoted if the quality of language input is improved and more chances for learning and participating in classroom activities are provided to students within the limited teaching time in class[27],[28]. Zhao compared the correction feedback forms for language errors and the impact of correction feedback forms on students' output among three classes of different language levels with the help of a corpus of 30 English lessons[26]. Xian &Sun discovered a big difference in teacher talk between experienced teachers based on corpus analysis. The teaching material cannot decide the feature of teacher talk, and sometimes even the teacher talk in student-centered class may not share the characteristic of natural conversation[29].

3. Methodology

This research will be conducted by three instruments: classroom observation and video recording, questionnaire, and interview.

The purpose of classroom observation and video recording is to investigate and analyze the features of teacher talk from in-service and pre-service English teachers in three dimensions which include time allotment, questioning, and feedback. Since this is a case study, the investigation of 3 in-service English teachers will be carried out in Yangtze Normal University. The investigation of 3 pre-service English teachers will be conducted in the internship period in Shiyan Middle school which is our internship base. Three lessons of 45 minutes will be recorded.

In order to validly evaluate the feature and quality of teacher talk between them, the criterion should be established. According to Senior, teachers who want to conduct the successful communicative–oriented class should establish a good relationship with students, for example, treat everybody equally, respect students, give a positive comment on students' performance, etc. [23] Darn advises some techniques of questioning, teachers are encouraged to ask open-ended questions and to keep a balance of referential and display questions[16]. As for the feedback and speed modification, Thornbury suggests that teachers may focus on what is said, rather than how it is said and give proper wait time[25]. Clifton advocates 'teachers sometimes provide feedback to students with short utterances such as uhu or yeah'[16]. Moon thinks in order to maintain a pleasant atmosphere, sometimes jokes of the target language are needed[18]. The questionnaire and interview will be designed for more detailed information about their attitudes towards their classroom interaction and the influence of in-service English teachers on pre-service English teachers. The questionnaire will be handed out to students and graduates who are teachers in school. Interviewing with both pre-service English teachers and middle school students is necessary, which can improve the reliability and validity of this research.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 Time allotment of teacher talk and student talk

Teacher	Teacher talk	Student talk
1	50%	35%
2	65%	28%
3	62%	30%
4	70%	15%

5	83%	10%
6	75%	12%

As one can see in table 1, it was shown that a range of 50% to 65% of class time was allocated to teacher talk by first three in-service teachers, while about 70% to 83% of class time has been devoted to teacher talk by the latter pre-service teachers. It is easily found that teacher talk occupies most of the class time. The class, to some extent, is teacher-centered. Because the middle school students are on a preliminary level, the pre-service teachers speak more in class, while the middle school students are inclined to listen.

Table 2 Types of questions asked by teachers

Teacher	Procedural	Convergent	Divergent
1	14%	20%	66%
2	10%	21%	69%
3	11%	17%	72%
4	24%	49%	27%
5	30%	68%	2%
6	18%	76%	6%

Table 2 displayed different types of questions asked by teachers in class; we could easily find that the first three in-service teachers mainly focused on divergent questions, which specifically refer to their view on the texts to cultivate their critical thinking; on the contrary, the latter three pre-service teachers attached more importance to convergent questions and procedural questions. From the transcript, the convergent questions asked by pre-service teachers mostly are related to word, phrases and sentence structure from the textbook, and pre-service teachers prefer to ask the following procedural questions "Is that clear?" "Are you ready?" "Understand?"

Table 3 Feedback of students' response by teachers

Teacher	Positive	Negative	No
1	80%	16%	4%
2	76%	19%	5%
3	78%	20%	2%
4	53%	47%	0%
5	50%	46%	4%
6	52%	47%	1%

It has indicated that both in-service and pre-service teachers like to give positive feedback to establish their confidence. The reason for more negative feedback from pre-service teachers is related to the questions they ask. The questions they ask are the spelling of words, the usage of expressions, phrases, and the formation of sentence structure, so the answers are fixed.

From the questionnaires, With regard to the communication effect in class, the result shows 88% of pre-service teachers occasionally use the expressions which are used by their in-service teachers, in the same way, about 52.54% of the middle-high school students sometimes use the examples in their daily life listed by their pre-service teachers in class, which indicates that both in-service and pre-service teachers failed to create authentic communication atmosphere.

Regarding the influence of questioning on pre-service teachers' English proficiency, 90% of interviewees held a positive attitude that questioning could help them concentrate in class and keep a good mood for study, especially can urge them to show their ideas critically; 10% of interviewees stated that questioning might increase their anxiety and is harmful to their output. In comparison, 88.14% of middle school interviewees support this way to help them grasp the key and essential points, while 8.47% of middle school interviewees have innocence attitudes toward the questions.

With respect to the feedback, 80% of pre-service participants point out that in-service teachers will give a specific comment on their answers, while 52.54% of middle school participants point out pre-service teachers prefer to use some simple words just like "good" "well done" "ok" "yes" "thank you", which may not be suitable for their motivation for study. About 50.85% of pre-service teachers will follow that way if students face the same problem. In regard to the wait time, about 66% of in-service teachers and 72.88% of pre-service teachers will give less than 30 seconds for students to think. When students cannot give answers immediately, about 66% of in-service teachers will extend wait time and let students think more, if the students still cannot get the point, in-service teachers will explain the questions one more time to evoke the answers. 62% of pre-service teachers mentioned that the proper feedback on them by in-service teachers occasionally evoke their enthusiasm, in contrast, 73.88% of middle school participants mentioned the proper feedback on their performance by pre-service teachers always build their confidence and elicit their desire for study.

Refer to the effect of teacher talk on pre-service teachers, 34% of pre-service participants said in-service teachers' talk has great influence on their talk, 16% of them pointed out their teachers' talk has little effect on their output, 50% of participants are in a middle line. Specifically, Pre-service participants mentioned the way to error correction, and content feedback can facilitate their involvement in class. When they made mistakes, most of their teachers do not correct the errors directly and give a right answer or invite other students instead; in-service teachers would paraphrase the questions again and help them to repair the answers by themselves, which can construct students learning potential. With regard to the content feedback, in-service teachers do not give a general comment while making a concrete judge on their content, which makes students think teachers are listening to their voices and they want to show more in class. In-service teachers' talk also has some adverse effects on pre-service teachers. Improper echo (frequently use of "ok") or the improper time of echo students' answer would decrease their involvement.

5. Conclusion

From the data collected, in-service teachers' talk plays a constructive and obstructive role in pre-service teachers' learning process. In-service teachers should improve the teaching approach to make them have better performance in a trial class. There follow some suggestions: teacher talk should be authentic which is highly related to our real life, and the time allotment of teacher talk should be within 15-20 minutes in 45 minutes' class; the feedback should be diversified to facilitate their emotion and make them know what they have done well and what they should improve.

Acknowledgment

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