

English Phonological Modification of Teacher Talk for Indonesian Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Phonological modification of teacher talk is one of crucial things in teaching English as a foreign language for secondary school students. It aims at providing a comprehensible input and language model for students within the efforts of creating effective and meaningful teaching and learning activities designed. Therefore, this study is to explore the ways of employing English phonological modification and the reasons for using it for teaching secondary school students. To gain the data needed, the researcher applied descriptive qualitative research to explore the phenomenon in EFL classroom interaction involving three English teachers who perform their teaching at two different secondary schools in South Sulawesi, Indonesia; SMA Negeri 1 dan 2 Parepare. A direct classroom observation entailing audio recording and interview were utilized to gain the data and analyzed based on the conversational analysis framework. The data analysis reveals that EFL teachers regularly modify their English phonology by using four distinctive features, namely it is more extended pauses, slow rate of speech, exaggerate articulation, and clear articulation. Moreover, these modifications occurred in three numbers of reasons for emphasizing the presented materials, providing understandable and comprehensible input, and modeling the students to the target language. Those findings are taken into account that the use of phonological modification accelerated students' comprehension in learning English.

Keywords: *Phonological modification, teacher talk, Indonesian secondary school.*

INTRODUCTION

English as foreign language classroom has the core of communication between teachers and students interacting with one another. It takes into account as they involve in a process of four communicational discourse frames where teaching and learning process takes place, that is lesson frame, lesson support frame, commentary frame, and institutional frame providing some language forms and functions uttered for both their academic and social interaction in the classroom (Pennington, 1999). In the sense of students learning English as foreign language (EFL), classroom interaction within the four discourse frames may result a good comprehensible input which benefit to the students both in practicing and using the target language communicatively as the attainment of good language model from teacher verbal communication. Therefore, an appropriate language instruction of teacher can help and engage students' interest to actively execute classroom activities given within communicative language expressions as well.

In the line with the previous idea, Krashen (1985) highlights teacher talk as an important source of comprehensible input for the language acquisition of the students. It is supported by Nunan (1991:189) stating that teacher talk is crucial of importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. From these starting points, the students effectively develop their English through the three phases of teaching and learning process in the classroom. Nevertheless, creating effective and communicative atmosphere in foreign language classroom is not an easy thing to do since communication sometimes breakdowns between teachers and their students in which the teachers may not communicate effectively and comprehensibly. It comes on the surface since the teachers who must be able to perform an important role as an accessible information provider to the students requires an important competency. Using an understandable language is necessary to the effectiveness of teacher talk in the frame of good classroom management. Therefore, they need to modify or adjust their talk in all linguistic aspects with the students' language proficiency level in classroom interaction to help them grasp a good understanding of the materials presented in English.

In relation to the use of teacher talk in classroom, Chaudron (1988) pointed out a teacher may come with four aspects of language modification to deliver their teaching materials to students, that is phonology, syntax, lexical, and discourse. Firstly, a teacher to modify her talk in phonological aspect should be characterized by exaggerated articulation, extended pauses and slower rate of speech. Secondly, a teacher adjusting her talk in syntactical aspect is figured out by the use of fewer subordinate or embedded clauses and short utterances. Thirdly, modifying teacher talk in lexical aspect is indicated by the diversity of vocabulary by avoiding colloquial expressions and slang words. Finally, discourse aspect modification is characterized by the repetition of the teacher's utterances to make her explanation clear and understandable.

In Indonesian context, some researches on teacher talk modification had already been conducted. Rahayu (2013) on her research entitling "*Language Modification and Supportive Actions by an English Teacher at an ELY Classroom*" investigated how a teacher modifies her language and what she does to support her language in classroom. She applied Pinter's language modification framework (2006) and Harmers' paralinguistic (2002). She found that the teacher tended to modify her language by repeating her utterances and implementing paralinguistic features especially gesture to lead the students meet what her talk was about. Regarding to the similarity of this research, they explore about teacher language modification. However, the current study has different focus concerning with phonological aspect of teacher talk while the previous research took her focus on the language modification and teacher supportive action. Furthermore, Muhayyang (2017) on her research about "*Phonological Modification on Teacher's Instructional Talk for Secondary School Students*". She found that the teachers modified their instructional talk into some *Indonesian* sounds on both English vowels and consonants in the beginning, during, and closing phases of teaching. This research has a close link with the present study undertaking an observation on phonological modification of teacher talk in EFL classroom for secondary school students.

Acknowledging the importance of teacher talk adjustment in EFL classroom, the researcher takes her eyes into a depth investigation on English phonological modification performed by teachers in EFL classroom interaction covering the three phases of teaching and learning for secondary school students, that is beginning, during, and closing phases. In conjunction with this concern, the researcher seeks the answers to the two following research questions:

1. How do the teachers modify their phonological aspects of talk in EFL classroom interaction?
2. Why do they modify their phonological aspects of talk in EFL classroom interaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Talk Modification

Teacher talk modification refers to the teacher's technique in simplifying the language input to make it available and accessible to the students (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The use of language modification in classroom can avoid misunderstanding between the teacher and the students (Pinter, 2006). The way teacher modifies her talk in teaching and learning process provides comprehensible input to the students to achieve teaching and learning process goals oriented. According to Walsh (2011:6) the modification strategies used by teachers are not accidental; they are conscious and deliberate and occur for a number of reasons, they are understandable input, language model, and classroom management.

In terms of understandable input, the teachers need to modify their speech to make students understand what they are saying about. It is highly unlikely that students will progress if they do not understand their teacher. To keep in touch with this reason, Lynch (1996) stated that there is a link between comprehension and second language progress. Typically, a teacher's speech is slower, louder, more deliberate, and makes greater use of pausing and emphasis. In addition, they could also make a great deal of use of gestures and facial expressions to help convey meaning. For much of the time, to become a good language model for their students, they must be able to use an appropriate articulation of language sounds, sentence, intonation, word stress, and so on in order to give students an opportunity to hear the correct and appropriate sounds of the target language. In many cases and in many parts of the world, a teacher's articulation of a second language may be the only exposure to the language that students actually receive. It is important, therefore, that the L2 is modeled correctly and appropriately because students' language is strongly influenced by teacher language (Lynch, 1996). In relation to classroom management, speech modification is due to the fact that there is so much happening at any moment in a classroom that teachers need to ensure that the class is running smoothly, that everyone understands, and that students do not 'get lost' in the rapid flow of discourse frames. Breen (1998) pointed out about teacher talk is needed for learners to 'navigate' the discourse frames and the fact that many students do actually get lost from time to time. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that this does not happen by making frequent use of repetition, by 'echoing' an individual learner's contribution for the benefit of the whole class, by asking for clarification and so on.

Furthermore, Long & Larsen-Freeman (1991:217) pointed out teachers modify their talks in three different aspects, namely phonology, syntax, and semantic explained as follow:

1. Phonological modification deals with patterning of the sound. it inherently goes to intonation, speech rate, pitch, articulation and pause between utterances. When teacher is dealing with EFL students, intonation is more exaggerated, and the pitch range used is wide and high. Moreover, the articulation should be clear, the speech rate is slower, and there are more pauses between the utterances.
2. Syntactical modification refers to the structure of the sentence. It deals with the length of utterance and grammatical aspects in which the length of speech aspect is shorter, less varied and less complex with fewer verbs per utterance, fewer coordinate and subordinate clauses

and fewer sentence embeddings. Therefore, teachers should employ shorter and simpler utterance to EFL students to create meaningful and understandable input.

3. Semantical modification. In semantic aspect, teachers employ restricted and basic vocabulary to modify their speech in which words used are suitable with the level and proficiency of the students. A difficult word, however, is avoided when dealing with EFL students in order to not make the students get difficult and confused to guess its contextual meaning.

Off those modifications above, phonological components play important part since they deal with the sound pattern systems in spoken form to appropriately meet with good characteristics of teacher language presentation in the classroom, that is clarity, simplicity, productivity, efficiency, and interesting in the frame of vocabulary restriction to be comprehensible input to the students. Furthermore, Chaudron (1988:58) pointed out teacher talk in phonological aspects is characterized by speech rate and pauses explained as follows:

1. Rate of speech: phonological modification of teacher talk is characterized by the rate of speech. Studies show that speech rate alters depending on with who the speakers are speaking to. Chaudron (1988:64) stated that most of researchers found that teachers' speech to second language learners is slower, in comparison with other contexts and conditions.
2. Pauses: several studies have observed the feature of phonological modification which contributed to overall rate of speech, but they may independently aid students' comprehension and processing of specific words, is amount and length of pauses. Chaudron (1988) argued pauses may be either intentionally made for comprehension, a result of teachers' extra time spent planning how to phrase their speech to adapt to the listeners, or they may simply be a natural concomitant of slower, more articulated speech. Additionally, Downes (1981) and Wasche and Ready (1985) found that nonnative teachers used more extended pauses than native teachers.

Based on the description above, it considers that teacher talk modification in phonological aspects is characterized by slowing down the speech, exaggerating pronunciation, extending pauses and simplifying regular forms when addressing students in EFL classroom. Moreover, rising final intonation and marked stress had an effect on emphasizing and focusing on the teachers' speech in a way of comprehension check.

METHOD

This study employs descriptive qualitative method aiming at collecting, analyzing, and interpreting several data related to English phonological modification of teacher talk in Indonesian context. The data resources were taken from three English teachers performing their teaching at two different Senior High Schools, they are SMA Negeri 1 and 2 Parepare, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. To gain the data, the researcher conducted classroom observation entailing audio recording to explore the ways of teachers modifying their talk in English phonology aspect. Then, interview was designed to obtain the data about the reasons for using phonological modification in classroom interaction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part comprises the results of data analysis as the answers to the two research questions addressed, namely (1) How do the teachers modify their phonological aspects of talk in EFL classroom interaction? and (2) Why do they modify their phonological aspects of talk in EFL

classroom interaction? The findings of these two research questions are described in the following lines.

1. The ways of teachers modify their phonological aspects of talk in classroom

The result of data analysis collected from both classroom observation and interview revealed that the three teachers made phonological modification on their talk figuring out the use of four distinctive features of phonological aspect, namely (a) more extended pauses, (b) slower rate of speech, (c) exaggerated articulation, and (d) clear articulation. These features are exemplified in their talk catering three phases of teaching that is presenting materials, practicing language, and language production described as follows:

a. More extended pause

To have a clear picture on this feature, the appearance of this characteristic on the teacher talk can be seen in the three following extracts.

Extract 1 (Teacher 1- HR)

Teacher: No, I mean ... Before UNBK... Sebelum UNBK... saya masuk yang sepekan itu? No?

Students: No ma'am

The extract 1 figures out the teacher 1 asked the students about her presence before having a national examination. She employed more pauses in her utterance. The first, she extended her pause of the utterance less than five second. The second, "*Before UNBK...*" she extended her pause in five second. The researcher believes that it might accidentally come on the surface to help the teacher have an extra time spending for gaining a good way to phrase his speech to adapt to the students' English proficiency level (Chaudron, 1988).

Extract 2 (Teacher 3 – MD)

Teacher: Yang tadi, maybe ... you can find in youtube, the title ... poetry invoice 2016, You can see the... expression. She is the winner... Ok... yang the last saya ambil dari ... film ... film Shakespear in love... the... title is Who is Silvia.

The extract above indicates that the teacher explanation was about the proper ways of reading poetry. She employed more extended pauses in her utterances by separating word and phrase articulation. Chaudron (1988) argued pauses may be either intentionally made for comprehension, or they may simply be a natural concomitant of slowness. In short, the occurrences of extended pauses are to lead the students attentively and clearly listen to the presentation points of hers.

Extract 3 (Teacher 2 – RS)

Teacher: Because it is narrative, when you start, when you ... are going to start, your dialogue ... Please for the first, introduce yourself. What's the name of your ... of your ... what's the name of your, what's the name of you in the story ...

The extract 3 above depicts teacher explanation before assigning the students to present their dialogue before the class. Teacher 2 explained much by unintentionally employing more extended pauses in her talk. It indicates that she independently modified her talk to bridge the

students' understanding and processing of using some specific words related to the material presented to the students.

b. Slower rate of speech

The use of slower rate of speech as a feature of teacher phonological modification can be seen in the three following extracts.

Extract 4 (Teacher 1- HR)

Teacher: *I give you example ... The first reason, yes ... we nervous ma'am ... you are the one that will face the UNBK, nervous. The second one, they said, study hard ... But the fun thing ... is the third one ... The third one, she said that suddenly the computer ... in Senior High School 1 Parepare is... stolen, hilang.*

The extract above depicts teacher 1 gave an example about cause and effect. She explained much about the effect that could happen from the cause "*next week is national examination*". The teacher's utterances indicated she modified her talk by employing slow rate of speech when she mentioned each effect that may happen. The researcher believed that she might speak slower as to draw students' attention to her description of facing national examination. So, the alteration of speech rate depends on who the speaker is speaking to. Chaudron (1988) confirmed that most of the researchers found teachers' speech to second language learners is quite slower in comparison with other context and condition.

Extract 5 (Teacher 3 – MD)

Teacher: *Nah today... I will show you some... poetry... the famous poetry... So, I hope...*

The extract 5 depicts the teacher 3 spoke slowly in classroom when teaching about poetry by pausing more her utterance in order to have an extra time thinking of what she is going to say. Long & Larsen-Freeman (1991) pointed out teacher talk should be clear, the speech rate is slower, and there are more pauses between the utterances.

Extract 6 (Teacher 2 – RS)

Teacher: *and then, after introducing your dialogue ... at the end of your dialogue then you say the moral message. Remember* for writing the moral message in your book, and then say it in the end of your performance

The extract 6 above shows that the teacher 2 instructed the students to perform the dialogue in a good manner. She explained what the students should do at the beginning and end of the performance by talking much slower so it may obviously lead the students go with the instruction provided.

c. Exaggerate articulation

The occurrences of exaggerate articulation as a feature of phonological modification of teacher talk can be seen in the following extracts:

Extract 7 (Teacher 2 – RS)

Teacher: *When I invite the first group*, means that the other groups do not have time to memorize that dialogue *because your time is over. Please...* your book, no other activity...

The extract 7 above reveals that the teacher 2 allowed the students to know what they should do during the performance by exaggerating her articulation in order to emphasize her utterances.

Extract 8 (Teacher 1 – HR)

Teacher: *Look at activity 1!* Warming up, over there. *Read the example!*

The extract 8 above figures out that the teacher instructed the students to have a look at the task about cause and effect by raising her voice louder to give an emphasis on her utterances and the students could clearly hear her instruction as a result. Chaudron (1988) stated that a rising final intonation and marked stress in several teachers' speech had an effect on their speech in a way to check students' understanding.

Extract 9 (Teacher 3 – MD)

Teacher: *Suaramu tolong lantangkan, Ketika dia marah, ketika dia sedih*, dia kecilkan suaranya sampai-sampai hampir kita tidak dengar. Tapi ketika dia bilang, *"I'm not slave, I'm the people"*, tekanan suaranya naik lagi

The extract 9 depicts the teacher 3 explained some appropriate ways of reading poetry. In several part of her utterance, she put her voice louder to clearly emphasize her utterance and to make the students find an ease to catch what the teacher said.

Those extracts above simply reveal how the teachers phonologically modify their talk during the three phases of teaching by having more extended pauses when presenting the subject of the lesson, slowing down the rate of speech to produce clear articulation, and exaggerating the articulation in instructing the students to go with and giving example of speaking in a good manner. Consequently, their utterances are clearly heard and understandable for the students. Phonological modification, in short, bridges the teachers to talk in English as to make the students readily perceive the points of their presentation and to facilitate communication of theirs for both language forms and language functions (Ellis, 1980).

d. Clear articulation

The appearance of clear articulation in teacher talk is obviously initiated by their own efforts to provide the students a good understanding on their teaching points of English grammar and pronunciation as proved in the following extracts.

Extract 10 (Teacher 1 – HR)

Teacher: To sum up... It is still about *cause and effect*... related to the *because/because of*, *thanks to*, and *due to*... after... Because, *it should be complete sentence... and because of, thanks to and due to are followed by... noun and Ving ...*

The extract above simply shows the teacher's explanation of the different use of **cause** and **effect**, **because** and **because of** with a clear articulation to emphasize the point of her presentation to lead the students easily get their use in grammatical sentence construction.

Extract 11 (Teacher 2 – RS)

Teacher: ... "sejak saat itu, I don't know, can you say it in English?"

Lufia: Science then [She tended to say "since then] ... Oh... since then

Teacher: Can you repeat?

Lufia: Oh... Since then [correct pronunciation]

Teacher: Yah... *since then*. Tadi kita dengarnya “*science*” yah. Science means “ilmu pengetahuan” yah

Extract 12 (Teacher 3 – MD)

Teacher: It’s ok. Not all of... text have... closing... Are you sure it’s closing ... *Are sure it’s closing, Ansar?* [Teacher asked what the student writes]

The extract 11 and 12 show a conversation between teachers and students in which the teacher 2 articulated the words clearly to lead the students correct the mispronunciation of words occurred in their own utterances, that is **since** and **science**. Additionally, the teacher 3 checked the students’ answer on the question offered by employing a clear articulation to assure him the generic structure of the text given.

2. The reasons for modifying the phonological aspects of teacher talk in classroom

The interview results that the teachers had phonological modification in their language instruction during teaching and learning process due to the three logical reasons, namely emphasizing to the presented materials, providing some comprehensible input, and being a good language model. These findings are described clearly in the following lines.

a. Emphasizing to the presented materials

In the interview, the three observed teachers conveniently assumed that modifying their phonological talk by having a slow way of saying for every single word uttered, speaking louder, and having a pause will certainly bridge the effectiveness of material delivery to make students easily catch the emphasized teaching points and the teachers as well to find another way of thinking for saying further ideas as stated in the following extracts.

Extract 13 (Teacher 2 – RS)

Teacher: *To make students understand well and to emphasize the material spoken in English...*

Extract 14 (Teacher 1 – HR)

Teacher: *To make sure my student with low English skill understand*

Extract 15 (Teacher 3 – MD)

Teacher: *Because students have limited vocabulary ... and also pauses give me time to think also@ about what I should say. If I speak slower, students will easily catch the information. Or maybe, they find new vocabulary when I talk, maybe*

Those three extracts above obviously indicated the teachers’ reasons for modifying their talk in phonology are to make the students easily understand the learning objectives oriented, to emphasize the materials presented, and to help the students catch the conveying meaning of words due to the vocabulary limitation of theirs. Typically, a teacher’s speech is slower, louder, more deliberate, and makes greater use of pausing to think what should be deliberately said further. In line with these characteristics, Breines (2002:472) said teacher talk should be a

language input for the students' foreign language development. Additionally, Lynch (1996) convinced that there is an inherent link between comprehension and second language progress.

b. Providing comprehensible input

In the phonology level, the modification of teacher talks used by the three teachers usually takes the form of slowing down the rate of speech, separating words/syllables articulation, using more careful pronunciation by giving heavier stress, and increasing volume on key words. The underlying principle of these features is that if teachers make their talk slowdown and produce clear articulation, their utterances will be heard clearly. Thus, the students will easily understand the speech. This is plausibly acceptable because slow rate will allow more processing time and clearer segmentation of the structures in the input. Slow rate will also make the speech sounds salient. Thus, the talk becomes simpler and easier to understand. Once the teachers go with those characteristics, they unconsciously put their talk a comprehensible input for the students' language development.

c. Being a good language model

The three English teachers were really aware of being a good model for their students' language development. They consequently noticed every language form and function used in the frame of abovementioned good language instruction characteristics during the teaching presentation phases. It comes on the surface as they would like to put their talk in all aspects to be imitated by the students and they, however, consciously believe that they are not the only one of language input source due to the availability of language learning resources within the rapid development of science and technology as proved by the following extracts.

Extract 16 (Teacher 3-MD and 2-RS)

Teacher: *Off course, student is an imitator.*

Extract 17 (Teacher 2-RS)

Teacher: *Yeah... that's why teacher needs to learn much before teaching as teacher is the language model in class.*

Extract 18 (Teacher 1-HR)

Teacher: *Not really, because some students get their English skill through communicative learning (song, movie, so on)*

The extracts above show the teachers' assumptions about their talk modification affecting the students' language acquisition in which they imitate their teacher because they are a language model and input for them as the result. Being a good language model, they need to be well prepared and packaged in both competence and performance of English either inside or outside of classroom. They believed that their students are making a great effort of imitating their language; they are learning new words and expressions which are useful and meaningful for their own communication as well. However, both their articulations and utterances of English may not be the only exposure to the language that students are learning about as they have already had their prior English knowledge and skills through other available communicative learning sources, such as songs, movies, or social media.

CONCLUSIONS

Data analysis reveals that EFL teachers regularly modify their talk through the use of phonological modification features, namely the use of more extended pauses, slow rate of speech, exaggerate articulation and clear articulation and in teaching and learning process. In addition, the teachers modified their talk in three numbers of reasons, namely emphasizing to the presented material, providing comprehensible input, and being a good language model. These findings take into account that teacher talk modification accelerated students' comprehension and bridged the teachers to talk in English as to make students perceived the points of the presentation well.

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