



## Teacher Talk to Accommodate Low-Proficiency Learners in EFL Classes: A Case Study

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Instructional design is usually focused on the presentation of materials. The principles of teachers' language-use strategies have scarcely been discussed. In an EFL context, teachers are required to use the target language to promote learners' language acquisition. What is the language like when the learners still have low language proficiency? This study aims to describe the speech features of non-native teachers of English addressed to lower-proficiency learners in EFL classes. The data were collected by observation, interview, and recording the teachers teaching English in lower classes, i.e. semester one, and its comparable counterpart of higher classes, i.e. semester five of the English Department in a public university in Malang, Indonesia, and then analyzed by describing and comparing inter-levels intra-subjects. Despite some variability among subjects, it was found that there was a tendency that the language addressed to lower-proficiency learners has specific characteristics encompassing formal, interactional, and native language features that were simpler than that to higher-proficiency learners. This study concludes a principle of instructional delivery that student's level of knowledge and language ability determined the level of teacher speech. Hence, instructional designers should also describe how a medium of instruction is used, not merely how the learning material is presented.

**Keywords:** comprehensible, linguistic adjustment, low-proficiency learners, teacher talk

### Introduction

Linguistic input is effective on language acquisition (Bahrani, Sim, & Nekoueizadeh, 2014; Tarone, 2002) through comprehension when it is simplified (Crossley, Allen, & McNamara, 2012), abundant, and comprehensible (Krashen, 2013). Consequently, as an input giver, teachers are required to use the target language as much as possible since the early stage of instruction. Teachers' speech should be adjusted according to the level of the learners' linguistic competence (Ivanova, 2011). What does, then, the teacher's talk produced by non-native teachers look like when addressed to low proficiency learners?

Instructional design encompasses various aspects, such as the development of learning materials (Tomlinson, 2012), the teaching strategies (Abrami et al., 2015), and the evaluation system (Socha, 2011). As a part of the language teaching strategies, the medium of instruction has been studied mostly focusing on whether to use the target language and/or native language (Choi & Leung, 2017; Krulatz et al., 2016; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2012; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Probing how the teacher talk is adjusted according to the proficiency levels of the learners has so far been scarcely done.



## Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on teacher talk in EFL settings with different focuses. Forman (2012) revealed six functions of native language and target language talk in Thailand, Cowie (2011) focused on the emotions of EFL teachers towards their students and colleagues in Japan, Xu (2013) in China unfolded the professional identity changes of EFL teachers, Basra and Thayyibah (2017) uncovered the speech acts performed by EFL teachers in Indonesia, and Skinner (2016) compared native and non-native teachers' concepts of effective teacher talk. This present study focuses on describing the characteristics of teacher talk produced by non-native teachers in the Indonesian context. In Indonesia, it has been disputable whether or not to use English as a medium of instruction in teaching English (Hamied, 2012).

In an EFL setting, the teacher's speech is potentially important. The teacher is one of the most influential figures to be taken by language learners as a model (Blašková et al., 2014; Liepa & Špona, 2015). Whatever is said by the teacher might be carefully attended to and, most probably, imitated by learners. As the teacher is the learning program designer, planner, and executor, s/he plays a decisive role as to whether to produce sufficient or insufficient quantity of, comprehensible or incomprehensible linguistic input. Safari and Liknasab (2020) found that teacher's input is effective in increasing learners' pragmatic competence.

It has been claimed by several studies about the relationship between comprehensible input and language acquisition (Bahrani et al., 2014; Collentine, 2013; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Krashen & Bland, 2014; VanPatten, 2013). To be comprehensible, input is simplified in the forms of using syntactically less complex sentences (as measured by the number of words and clauses per T-unit), and a lot of rephrasing and restatement. It contains pronunciation, grammar, and lexical adjustments (Gass & Mackey, 2006). Starling et al. (2012) state that teacher's modifications of instructional language have effects on the improvement of learners' writing ability and listening comprehension. They maintain that modifications also include the repetition and restatement of important information.

Teacher talk serves pedagogical and/or communicative functions (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Pedagogically, teacher talk is to be taken as a model to imitate. It can help learners perceive not only the knowledge content of the lesson but also the linguistic insights of the speech. The corollary of pedagogical purposes is that teacher talk, although modified in some ways, the modifications are hardly deviant from the standard linguistic system. The teachers always try to make their speech sound perfect to the learners because they believe that their language is taken as a model by them. As facilitators, teachers are helpful to the learners (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). They give sufficient input to acquire. When the learners begin to reproduce and are engaged in the process of hypothesis testing (Barr et al., 2013), teachers provide them with reinforcement to confirm or feedback to reject their hypothesis. Hence, modeling and feedback seem to characterize the teacher's speech.

For communicative purposes, teacher talk is produced to establish and maintain the teacher-learner social relationship. It might be used to draw and focus learners' attention or to stimulate and respond to messages. In sum, for pedagogical purposes, teacher talk is to help learners achieve a linguistic ability, for communicative purposes, it establishes social and psychological bonds among the class members, to enliven the classroom interaction to prepare a conducive situation for effective instructional process.

Considering the importance of teacher talk to be adjusted to the level of the learners' capacity, this paper focuses on describing and discussing the adjustments of teacher talk in terms of formal (phonological, lexical, and syntactic features), interactional, and native language features addressed to lower-proficiency learners by Indonesian teachers in an EFL classroom setting. The study also revealed whether the simplification was effective and intentional.

## Method

As a case study, this study focused on the non-native teachers' talk addressed to lower-proficiency learners in EFL classrooms, how the teacher talk was adjusted, and whether the adjustment was an effective strategy. Higher-proficiency learners were also included in the study as a comparable counterpart.

### Research Subjects

This study was to describe the characteristics of teacher talk addressed to learners of lower language proficiency class (LPC). To assure that the characteristics of simplification were due to the learners' inadequate proficiency, those features were compared with that of the learners of higher proficiency class (HPC). The research was conducted in three classes of semester one (LPC) and three classes of semester five (HPC) at the English Department, in a public university in Malang, Indonesia. The LPC learners in semester one (freshmen) of a university were the late teenagers of 18-20 years old, whereas the HPC learners in semester five of the university were early twenties of 21-23 years old. The LPC or HPC were taught using the same curriculum by the same lecturers.

The subjects were lecturers and students of LPC and HPC. Three lecturers were selected as they complied with the predetermined criteria. They were experienced, qualified, and competent English lecturers evidenced by the length of their teaching experience, academic qualification, and colleague recommendation. Each of them taught English skill courses in both LPC and HPC. Students were also taken as informants consisting of three students randomly taken from each of the LPC classes. That the lecturers taught skill courses in both LPC and HPC was to ensure that the data were comparable, i.e., when their talks to LPC were different from that to HPC, it must have been due to the divergence of the learners' levels.

### Data Collection

The data were collected by observation, recording, and interviews. Observation was done by taking notes of the authentic English instructional process to understand the context of the teacher talk. Recording was done unobtrusively to get the natural corpus data of the teacher talk. Interviewing the students was done immediately after the lesson to confirm if the teacher talk was comprehensible, while interviewing the lecturers was to obtain information about their language-using strategy. The instruments were the researcher as an observer and note-taker, transcriber, data collector, and analyst, aided by some electronic devices for recording and analyzing the phonological features. To comply with ethical matters, the researcher approached the lecturers asking for their permission to take their speeches as the research data and keeping them confidential in the report.

Having been transcribed, the data were prepared into 4 (four) data sets: timed data set, lexical data set, syntactic data set, and discourse data set. The timed data set was used to reveal the phonological features including the rate of speech measured by words per minute (WPM) (Rodero, 2012) and the distinctness of articulation measured by inter-raters' perception (Gordon, 2016). The lexical data set was to unfold the variety of vocabulary indicated by the distribution ratio of words (Schwab, Rowe, Cabrera, and Lew-Williams, 2018). The syntactic data set was to uncover the syntactic features designated by the mean length of sentences shown by the average number of words per sentence (WPS) (Radner et al., 2002) and the complexity of sentences denoted by the average number of clauses per sentence (cps) (Bae & Min, 2020; Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). The discourse data set was used to disclose the interactional features and native language uses.

Preparing the data sets was done, first, by dividing the transcript into five chunks and, second, determining the units of data in each chunk. This step was intended to take the samples out of the relatively abundant data available. To gain representative samples, the chunks were taken from every

other page throughout the transcript. The volumes of the chunks which were obtained ranged from 18 to 47 utterances consisting of 10 to 31 sentences comprising 120 to 390 words.

Timed sets for phonological features were gained by scrutinizing the transcripts while playing the tape and attending to a stop-watch. Every 15 minutes, the transcripts were marked with slanting bars. The utterances between bars were counted as one unit. Lexical sets were determined by taking units of 100 words starting the count from the parts (upper, middle, and bottom) of every other page of the transcripts. The words counted were those that belonged to complete sentences. Syntactic sets were prepared by taking units of 10 complete sentences from every other page of the transcripts excluding sentence fragments. The discourse set was taken entirely from the whole transcript including complete sentences, sentence fragments, and interjections, but excluding false starts, hesitations, and fillers.

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data was first, the formal (phonological, lexical, syntactic) features were described based on their indicators. The speech rate was identified by calculating the number of words per minute (Rodero, 2012). The distinctness of articulation was rated based on the raters' perception (Gordon, 2016). The variety of vocabulary was identified by counting the distribution ratio of words (Schwab et al., 2018). The mean length of sentences was shown by the average number of words per sentence (WPS) (Radner, et al., 2002), and the complexity of sentences was denoted by the average number of clauses per sentence (cps) (Bae & Min, 2020; Bardovi-Harlig, 1992).

Second, to confirm whether such characteristics were due to the low proficiency level of the learners, they were compared with that of HPC (inter-levels). To reveal the significance of differences, the Mann Whitney U test formula was used. Third, the interactional features were identified and described based on their occurrence and verbal realizations, whereas the native language uses were based on the frequency of their uses and their verbal forms. Fourth, the results of interviewing the LPC learners were inferred to confirm whether or not the teacher talk was comprehensible, whereas that of the teachers was concluded to approve that simplifying the teacher talk was an intentional effort and as a strategy to raise the effectiveness of the lesson.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This part presents formal features, interactional features, native language uses, teacher talk effectiveness, and teacher talk as a strategy.

### **Formal Adjustments**

The descriptive findings of formal features comprising phonological, lexical, and syntactic aspects are presented in TABLE 1. These numbers represented the means of indicator-based calculations generated from 5 observations of the teaching segments.

TABLE 1  
*The Description of Formal Features*

Features	Teachers		A		B		C		Average	
	Student Levels		LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC overall
Speech rate (words/minute)			52.92	45.04	68.12	108.5	49.5	70.47	56.84	74.67 65.75
Distinctness of articulation (inter-rater's perception)			2.93	3.40	2.66	2.46	3.06	2.86	2.88	2.90 2.89
Variety of vocabulary (ratio of word distribution)			0.54	0.69	0.48	0.54	0.47	0.71	0.49	0.64 0.56
Mean length of sentences (words/sentence)			7.48	11.52	7.54	10.64	5.58	11.32	6.86	11.16 9.01
Complexity of sentences (clauses/sentence)			1.16	1.52	1.18	1.58	1.10	1.74	1.14	1.61 1.38

The table shows that despite some variabilities among the three teachers, there was a tendency that the speech addressed to LPC was simpler than that to HPC. For the speech rate, for example, two subjects showed that their speech to LPC contained fewer words per minute (slower) than that to HPC, and one deviated from that norm. The same also applies to the distinctness of articulation because when the speech is slower, its articulation tends to be more exaggerated. For the other features, all the three teachers showed the same tendencies, i.e. the teacher talk addressed to LPC contained less varied vocabulary, averagely shorter sentences, and less complex sentences than that to HPC. The significance of differences calculated using the Mann-Whitney U test formula with the significance level of .05, the results are presented in TABLES 2A, 2B, 2C.

TABLE 2A  
*Findings of Formal Features for Teacher A*

Features	Teacher	A		U	Comparison
		Mean Ranks			
		LPC	HPC		
Speech rate		6.90	4.10	5.5	Not significant
Distinctness of articulation		3.60	7.40	3.0	Not significant
Variety of vocabulary		3.60	7.40	3.0	Not significant
Mean length of sentences		3.00	6.00	0.0	Significant
Complexity of Sentences		3.70	3.70	3.5	Not significant

TABLE 2B  
*Findings of Formal Features for Teacher B*

Features	Teacher	B		U	Comparison
		Mean Ranks			
		LPC	HPC		
Speech rate		4.20	6.80	6.0	Not significant
Distinctness of articulation		6.40	4.60	8.0	Not significant
Variety of vocabulary		4.10	6.90	5.5	Not significant
Mean length of sentences		3.40	7.60	2.0	Significant
Complexity of Sentences		3.20	7.80	1.0	Significant

TABLE 2C  
*Findings of Formal Features for Teacher C*

Features	Teacher C		U	Comparison
	Mean Ranks			
	LPC	HPC		Significance of U
Speech rate	3.60	7.40	3.0	Not significant
Distinctness of articulation	6.10	4.90	9.5	Not significant
Variety of vocabulary	3.10	7.90	0.5	Significant
Mean length of sentences	3.00	8.00	0.0	Significant
Complexity of Sentences	3.00	8.00	0.0	Significant

The phonological adjustments including the rate of speech and the distinctness of the articulation are naturally paradoxical. When the rate is slower, the distinctness is greater, and vice versa. The table shows that although the rate of speech addressed to LPC and HPC among all teachers was not significantly different, two of them tended to have a slower rate when addressed to LPC than to HPC. This phenomenon was consistent with the distinctness of articulation which shows the tendency of more distinct articulation when addressed to LPC than to HPC.

This is in line with Krause (2004) who states that among the phonological features of clear speech is that it is characterized by the reduction of speech rate, clear articulation, exaggeration of stress, and intonation pattern. The underlying principle of these features is that by slowing down the rate and producing clear articulation, the utterance can be heard clearly. Thus, learners can easily understand the speech. Fluent and faster speech is more difficult to understand because of the lack of recognizing word boundaries (Cole, 2006). By producing the speech at a slow rate and distinct articulation, a clear separation of words can be recognized and the speech can be easily understood. It also makes the speech sound salient. Hence, the talk becomes easier to understand because exaggerated articulation makes it more perceptible, thus the learners are capable of recognizing the words easily. Fujita (2017) also claims a slower rate and more salient speech affect greater comprehension.

In lexical use, modifications cover the use of restricted vocabulary size, replacing difficult items with more frequently occurring ones, and repeating words (Kuperman & Van Dyke, 2013; Schwab et al., 2018). The findings show that all teachers had the same tendency, i.e. a smaller variety of vocabulary of speech addressed to LPC than that to HPC. When teaching the lower-level classes, teachers tended to repeat the words more frequently and used less varied vocabulary items. Repeating the same words, rather than using their equivalents, to express similar concepts results the simplicity.

Using less varied vocabulary has twofold advantages regarding the context of teaching a language to lower learners. First, attending to less varied vocabulary is easier because in that way the learners need not exert more energy to attend to symbol-meaning associations. Thus, they can easily recognize the words and understand the meaning of the speech. Second, by repetition, the words might be easily memorized, and hence, acquired. This is consistent with Diessel's study (2007) that frequency of use is effective in language acquisition.

The syntactical modifications manifest in shorter mean length and lower complexity of sentences. The table demonstrates the significantly smaller mean length of sentences implying that the speech addressed to LPC is averagely shorter than that to HPC. Regarding the complexity of sentences, the teachers tended to demonstrate less complex sentences when the speech was addressed to LPC than to HPC.

These findings were confirmed by some previous studies which revealed that teacher talk addressed to the lower proficiency learners consists of shorter sentences than that to those of higher proficiency. Ryu and Jeon (2020) revealed that sentence length is an indicator of sentence difficulty. Long sentences contain more complicated concepts and ideas, thus, becoming complex and more difficult to perceive (Zipoli, 2017). Teacher talk is likely to consist of fewer clauses per sentence when addressed to low proficiency learners than that to the higher ones. The more clauses the sentence contains, the more complex the ideas carried. Hence, the speech becomes more difficult to understand.

## Interactional Features

The findings of interactional features described based on their occurrence in the data are presented in TABLE 3, and their formal realizations are exemplified.

TABLE 3  
*Findings of Interactional Features*

Features	Classes	Teachers	A		B		C	
			LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC
Comprehension checks			-	+	+	+	+	+
Confirmation checks			-	-	+	-	-	-
Clarification requests			-	-	+	+	-	+
Self-repetitions			+	+	+	+	+	+
Other-repetitions			+	+	+	+	+	+
Corrections			+	-	+	+	-	+
Expansions			+	+	+	+	+	-
Feedbacks			+	+	+	+	+	+
Modelings			-	-	-	-	+	-

Where: + : Existent in the data, - : Not existent in the data

The interactional features found in the data were nine functions and diversely distributed. They were used for communicative and pedagogical purposes. Comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests were used to make teacher-student communication successful. The formal realizations of the interactional features are exemplified below. Comprehension checks were to ascertain that the learners understood the speech.

*Teacher (T): ...then you can just put up or pick up the content or the main content, the summary of the paragraph, just by taking the summary of the whole, of the whole passage. **Do you understand what I mean?***

Confirmation checks were to confirm the preceding repeated student's utterances.

*T: He says that first summary indicates that bees know all colors. **Is that what you mean?***

Clarification request was to ask the learners to clarify what they meant.

*T: I don't clearly catch what you mean. **Can you repeat again?***

To communicate effectively with the learners, teachers need to check if the learners understand the speech, to be confirmed that the teachers understand and hear the learners' utterances correctly and grasp the meaning accurately, and to request clarifications from the learners not to misunderstand.

Self- and other-repetitions, corrections, expansions, feedbacks, and modelings were to serve pedagogical purposes. Self-repetitions were realized in the forms of partial repetition or different paraphrases. For example,

*T: These words with asterisks here, they are words which are not used in, ehm, in a polite expression. **They are, ehm, they're not, ehm, not very polite expressions to use. These words like obese, big like a barrel, skinny, those are words not normally used in polite expressions.***

Teachers also repeated learners' utterances to confirm and anchor the correct expressions in their minds.

*T: What is torso? Inside and outside torso.*

*Student (S): The human body without her limbs and head.*

*T: Yeah. **Human body without head and limbs.** That is torso.*

Corrections were given responding to learners' errors by giving the correct form directly or by explaining the rule indirectly.

*S: We are /ju:nebel/ [unable]*

*T: /aneibel/*

*T: (commenting on a learner's error, the teacher pointed out the error) ... because of the students is an intellectual. **Because of is followed by noun phrase, not clause, ya? Because of students' intellectual ...***

Teachers expanded the learners' utterances to complete a concept.

*S: Campaign.*

*T: Yes, campaign. **Campaign to look for followers. Campaign is meant to gather votes, yeah enrich votes as much as we can. Votes. Win the votes. So, this is an effort to win the vote.***

Teachers gave feedback for positive or negative reinforcement to create learners' correct habits. An example of negative feedback is as follows.

*T: Thirty two.*

*S: ... but I have never spoke.*

*T: **No. Not spoke, spoken. Once again.***

Modelings were given to drill or to practice appropriate pronunciation.

*T: OK. Now the following page 25. OK, I read and you repeat, ya? **He is a giant man.***

*Students (Ss): (repeating)*

*T: **Extremely tall***

*Ss: (repeating)*

*T: **Tallish***

*Ss: (repeating)*

Due to the meager linguistic ability, learners are usually slow in processing input. To compensate for such a defect, teachers usually repeat their utterances more often so that the learners have enough time to recognize the utterances. Teachers also sometimes repeat the learners' utterances instead of their own. That is to tailor and incorporate the learners' utterances into their utterances. This is important to keep the explicit coherence of interaction because the learners, being not-proficient, can hardly understand inexplicit coherent utterances. Repeating learners' utterances functions as an explicit clue which facilitates learners to comprehend the communication (Sanders et al., 2007).

Having limited proficiency, it is natural that low proficiency learners make errors. In a language class, teachers often give not only linguistic corrections to prevent learners from bad habits but also positive feedbacks to reinforce proper language habits. This goes in line with the principle of behaviorism that language is a matter of habit formation (Brown, 2007). The importance of teacher's feedback in language teaching is also claimed by other studies (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2020). Expansions are also likely used by teachers in interaction with beginners. It is intended to make the learners' production fitter to the preceding utterances, thus making them linguistically and conceptually more proper. Modeling is also one of the characteristics of teachers' speech. In the language teaching and learning process, beginners need to seek abundant models to imitate. To satisfy that need, teachers often use

modeling in the process of their classroom instruction, which is functional to improve learners' pronunciation ability.

These findings go in line with the previous studies. The discourse modifications are manifested in the forms of using more here-and-now topics and more self-or-other repetitions (Rowe, 2013; Rieger, 2003). Zanzotto et al. (2011) maintain that redundancy is the repetition of the same information. For language learners, such a linguistically redundant input is an important factor for comprehension. The redundancy, in this case, refers to either formal or functional. Formal redundancy is manifested in terms of repetitive use of certain items or forms, such as repetitive use of certain words to express certain ideas, or that of certain structures to convey certain purposes. Functional redundancy refers to the repetition of semantic clarification to clarify the meaning of certain utterances, such as the repetitive use of elaboration, paraphrases, and expansions.

When learners show a lack of comprehension, messages are repeated or recoded (e.g. through paraphrases, the substitution of difficult vocabulary with more frequent lexical items, and the change of wh- with yes/no questions). To achieve learners' comprehension of the meaning, teachers perform negotiations of meaning which were realized in terms of teachers checking learners' comprehension, requesting the clarification of their utterances, and asking their confirmation of what the teachers hear or understand. In short, teachers always try to make themselves understand and be understood. Otherwise, communication fails.

The basic intention of modifications in teacher talk, in terms of phonology, lexicon, syntax, or discourse, is to make the utterances simpler, thus comprehensible. Comprehensibility enhances acquisition (Krashen, 2013). This statement implies an indirect relationship between adjustments and acquisition. It means, the adjustment does not directly promote acquisition, but it merely encourages comprehension. It is this comprehension that enhances acquisition.

The verbal manifestations of interactional features were varied constrained by teachers' individual preferences, their idiosyncratic dialects, and classroom teaching strategy. There was no consistent reason to predict the realizations of those features. One teacher addressing the same listeners may use a range of verbal expressions. To check comprehension, for instance, they used, "*Do you understand?*", "*You see?*", "*You got it?*" To request confirmation, they used, "*Is that what you mean?*", "*Did you say that?*". Such a phenomenon implies individual preferences.

It was also revealed that one teacher frequently said, "*Right?*" or "*OK?*" to check comprehension even when addressing different groups. This might be constrained by his idiosyncratic dialect. This inference was made cautiously and considered valid until there was some other evidence contradicting this finding. The teaching strategy may also constrain the use of interactional features. One teacher used drills or modeling imitated by students in presenting a new item in a vocabulary lesson. Another teacher, though teaching the same lesson to the same group, did not use it. This goes in line with Gass and Madden (1985) who assert that people may differ substantially in their communicative behaviors although they are in comparable circumstances.

## **Native Language Features**

This is a specific feature of teacher talk in an EFL context. Where teachers and learners share the same native language (NL), to accommodate learners' incompetence, teachers used a native language in the forms of translations and code-switching. Translation is defined as word-to-word inter-language shifts (target language–native language), code-switching refers to the elaborate use of one language, switching from the use of another language (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). This part presents the findings of the quantity of native language use and its verbal realizations.

TABLE 4  
*Findings of Native Language Features*

Features	Classes	Teachers		B		C	
		A		LPC	HPC	LPC	HPC
Use of translations		2	0	6	2	46	4
Use of code switching		8	0	57	2	51	2
Total use of native language		10	0	63	4	97	6
Total number of utterances		190	224	170	148	142	136
Percentage of native language use		5.26%	0%	35.19%	2.70%	68.21%	4.41%

The table shows that the use of native language, despite variabilities among teachers, tends to be more frequent in LPC than in HPC as indicated by greater percentages for all teachers. That the use of translations was fewer than that of code-switching is understandable because translation consists of utterances of word-to-word equivalents, while code-switching is utterances for elaborate speech.

Translations were verbally realized in the levels of words, phrases, and sentences mainly to improve learners' knowledge of vocabulary meaning. An example of using the word equivalents is, "*Campaign is meant to gather votes. Yah, enrich votes as much as we can. Suara. Vote. Win the vote.*" The word "vote" was followed by its NL translation "*suara*" and directly tailed by its targeted word and a sentence. This was to emphasize in the learners' minds that the NL equivalent of "vote" is "*suara*." In the example of the phrase, "*Some of you know you have intestine. There are two kinds, a large intestine, and small intestine. Usus halus. Usus halus,*" the phrase, "*usus halus*" was directly added to "small intestine." Translation of sentence was also found in the data, "*Probably you can pay attention to this word and this word. This is, this is more operational. Jadi ini lebih bisa operasional.*"

Target language-native language code-switching was used for several purposes: to explain the meanings of words and structural constructions, to give illustrations, to make jokes, and to give advice. An example of explaining the concept of an English word was, "... *But for some, some people thin here indicates less than normal, indicates not normal. Kurus, Kurus itu kurang sehat. Kurus itu seperti kurang makan, itu kurus.* [Thin. Thin is not healthy. Thin is like lack of eating, that is thin]..." In explaining the meaning of an English sentence construction, "... *Get it mended. You say, you must mend it. You are the expert. Bukan Anda sendiri yang mengerjakan, tapi orang lain* (You don't do it by yourself, but someone else does)," Here, the teacher wanted to explain the meaning of causative get. The example of code-switching used to give moral advice was, "... *knee-high to a grasshopper. Ya, sebagai orang bertuhan apapun juga kita terima dengan baik ...*(Yeah, as a religious person whatever (condition) we must accept)." Choi and Leung (2017) claim that teachers use code-switching in EFL classrooms.

The teachers used the native language for some purposes. First, they wanted to overcome the interactional constraints. Confronted with the difficulty of communication because of the audience's inadequate target language proficiency, as non-native speakers' limited competence, teachers maintained the smoothness of interaction using native language. Intensive interaction between teacher and learners plays a strategic role to promote the effectiveness of learning (Mercer & Howe, 2012). The use of NL was not only to accomplish efficient interaction but also to encourage successful communication, thus reinforcing the effective teaching and learning process (Duta et al., 2015). This is confirmed by teachers' use of NL for providing explanations and illustrations, joking, and giving ethical advice.

## Teacher Talk Effectiveness

The results of interviewing the low-proficient learners demonstrated that the informants could understand and follow the teachers quite well. That was evidenced by the fact that they could easily tell the researcher about the contents of the lesson. They could tell the main teaching points of the lessons. They could even recall some contents of the teaching materials. For instance, after the Reading lesson, the researcher asked, "*Could you tell me what the lesson was about?*" The students answered correctly, "*About experiment, bees and color.*" Another said, "*Bees could see different [they meant, differentiate] colors.*" In another class, after the Vocabulary lesson, when the researcher asked about the content of the

lesson, the learners answered appropriately, “*It’s about body, size.*” Another answered, “*Body shape [they meant, build].*” When the researcher tried to test their memory, “*What is obese?*” The learner answered, “*Very big, very fat.*” When the interviewer asked about the general evaluative question, “*In that lesson, did you understand what the teacher said?*” The learners replied that they did. Those responses indicated that the learners understood and could follow the lesson, implying that the teacher's talk was comprehensible.

It might be the limitation of this study to interview to unfold the effects of teacher talk on the learners' comprehension. However, as it aimed not to measure the extent of learning achievement, but merely a kind of comprehension check, a brief interview was considered sufficient and efficient to gain such information.

Interviewing the teachers was conducted after knowing the characteristics of teacher talk, so that, it was possible to probe and confirm them to their producers. Due to some lapse of time, the teachers sometimes needed to be reminded of what and how they said during the lesson. When asked why the teachers spoke more slowly, for example, the results of the interview showed that they just wanted to make themselves understood by the learners and to make the communication successful. They knew some strategies to make themselves understood, such as using mimics, gestures, instructional media, and language-related acts. They mentioned some language-related strategies, e.g. repeating, slowing down the speech, articulating more distinctly, translating into native language, mixing the codes, switching the codes, and saying a difficult word while writing it on the board.

Although the teachers knew and intentionally slowed down the speech when talking to low-proficiency students, they never thought and did not care about the number of words produced per minute, and how many words each sentence consisted of. They just spoke slowly and sometimes repeated their speech assuming that as far as students seemed to understand and could respond, they considered that the communication worked well. This is in agreement with Krashen's (2013) statement that complying with comprehensibility is like rough-tuning the radio signal. That the teachers could make themselves understood by the learners implies that they used simplifications.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Those findings have some implications related to teachers' characteristics, classroom instructions, and successful communication. A teacher is one of the components in a language classroom system besides students, materials, learning conditions, and interactional processes (Merrill, 2001). S/he plays a strategic role because it is s/he who designs, plans, implements, and evaluates the classroom instruction (Gujjar & Choudhry, 2009). The teacher interacts with the students in presenting the materials, conducting the activities, and establishing a conducive learning atmosphere. To carry out these tasks successfully, the teacher needs to have professional and pedagogical competencies (Puspitasari et al., 2016).

Professional competence refers to the teacher's mastery of subject matter and pedagogical competence to her/his mastery of strategies to conduct the teaching and learning process efficiently and effectively. In English language teaching, teachers are required not only to provide abundant but also understandable input (Krashen, 2013). The corollary is that they are obliged to use the target language most, if not all, of the time and to exert a variety of strategies to make the talk understood by the learners.

Making accurate linguistic adjustments necessitates teachers' awareness of students' characteristics as well as their linguistic competence levels. This goes in line with the principle of learner-centered teaching (Boyadzhieva, 2016) in that the teachers need to know their students and to be able to accommodate their teaching strategies including the use of medium of instruction. The teaching which is oriented to the fulfillment of the learners' needs is relevant to the humanistic education movement (Jingna, 2012).

Simplifying the target language as one of the teacher's strategies to increase the effectiveness of communication in the classroom also stimulates the learners' willingness to communicate. In a slightly different notion, this study is consistent with Vafadar and Foo's study (2020) which revealed that the

teaching of communication strategies had some effects on the Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Such a comfortable or convenient learning condition, where the teacher always used an understandable target language, was also effective in increasing learners' motivation to learn as indicated by Alakrash and Norizan's study (2020). In the context of EFL, learners will be successful in learning a language and improve their language competence when exposed to "a sufficient quantity of comprehensible input" (Krashen, 2013).

This is also in line with the accommodation theory (Gallois et al, 2006). Though originated in a sociolinguistic sphere, the concept of accommodation theory is applicable for ELT purposes, where the addressor (teacher) adapts her/his language according to the addressees' (learners) proficiency not only to reach effective communication, but also successful instruction. This linguistic phenomenon underlies the emergence of a pedagogical dialect in addition to the sociolinguistic dialects which have been categorized based only on the regional, social, and personal backgrounds of the language users (Wolfram & Schilling, 2016).

The findings also implicate that instructional design does not only focus on the development of learning materials but also the teachers' delivering strategies using a language that is appropriate with the learners' knowledge base. The corollary is that teacher talk needs to be included in the materials for teacher professional development.

The question remains as to how to make such adjustments. Besides exerting all possible tactics, such as using media, mimics, gestures, selection and/or development of relevant materials and topics, Krashen (2013) cites that teachers need to consider selection of vocabulary and structure. And, as far as teachers can make themselves understood by the learners, *i+1* is accomplished. So, what they are to do is rough-tuning the speech.

## Conclusion

### Summary of the Findings

Teacher's speech plays a very important role in promoting learners' acquisition of language. To be effective, it must comply with specific criteria, viz. it must be ample and comprehensible. To serve that purpose, the teacher should maximally use the target language and it should be simplified and adjusted according to the level of the learners' language proficiency. The simplification includes formal (phonological, lexical, and syntactic aspects) and interactional features. Since it was in an EFL context, simplifying teacher talk also consists of native language uses. To adjust the speech, what the teacher should do is rough-tuning the speech so that it can be perceived clearly by the learners' cognitive waves.

### Brief Statement of Pedagogical Implications

Such findings have some implications on the improvement of teachers' competences and classroom instructions. First, as teacher's language needs to be adjusted according to the learners' language ability, teachers' professional and pedagogical developments need to be oriented to increasing their ability to produce acquisition-promoting language input as well as their awareness and cognizance of the learners' differential language proficiency in order to be able to accommodate effective individualized instructions. Hence, teacher talk should be included in the materials for teachers' professional development programs.

Second, to raise the effectiveness of language teaching and learning process, teachers need to maximize the use of target language as a medium of classroom instructions. The instructional language should be modified in such a way that learners manage to comprehend it, thus communication becomes successful. In that way, the teacher's language is beneficial in several ways. It becomes model for the learners to imitate, input to promote acquisition, a means to communicate effectively, reinforcement for language practice, and a content carrier to transfer information and broaden learners' knowledge.

Third, this teacher talk can enrich the types of dialect, i.e. a pedagogical dialect in addition to the existing personal, regional, and social dialects. This study focused on the teacher talk used in the classrooms to teach the learners who were majoring in the English language. It is suggested that future research examine whether teacher talk (modified target language) is also appropriate in other domain-specific language learning.

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(Received December 07, 2020; Revised May 20, 2021; Accepted June 18, 2021)