

# ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ

УДК 811.512.122

DOI: 10.17223/19996195/37/9

## TEACHER TALK: DISCOURSE TECHNIQUES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the features of teacher talk, a type of speech directed at language learners in a classroom. The transcripts of NS teacher–NNS student interactions in an evening ESL course revealed a number of techniques that made teacher–student communication effective. Instructors often repeat and rephrase their statements, expand on their utterances and ask genuine questions, as well as gloss (use available mental associations) unfamiliar references. In addition, instructors may use personal pronouns to identify with or detach themselves from their students. This study will be useful for novice ESL teachers as well as practicing instructors who intend to examine their own communicative practices in classrooms.

**Keywords:** teacher talk; discourse techniques; teacher–student communication; communicative practices.

### Introduction

This paper examines the notion of simplicity in language in NS–NNS (native speaker – nonnative speaker) communication. People tend to simplify their speech in various circumstances, i.e. when they speak with children (baby talk), hearing impaired people or foreigners. The underlying belief is that the interlocutor may have trouble understanding the usual flow of speech or its grammatical or prosodic complexity. Hence, Gricean (1975) cooperative principle urges people to make necessary changes to their utterances to simplify the output for the interlocutor in an attempt to be understood. Ferguson (1971) called the phenomenon of accommodating native speech for nonnative speakers’ ‘**foreigner talk**’.

The intrinsic features of foreigner talk are modification of grammatical structure (morphological and sentential complexity), prosody (loudness, articulation, overt emphasis on topic words, intonation, and rhythm), simple vocabulary, few idioms or metaphors, longer pauses, more repetition, ample gesturing, more summaries of preceding sentences. Although Ferguson’s linguistic interest lay mainly in creoles and pidgins, he hypothesized that ‘the foreigner talk of a speech community may serve as an incipient pidgin’. He supported his observation by examples of native speakers who simplified

their language by omitting the copula *to be* or using uninflected forms of verbs. Such strategies are deployed to make speech easier to understand. Moreover, these forms of speech are often regarded as imitation of the way the person addressed uses the language himself.

Baby talk is a good example of such strategies as it is considered an important tool for social bonding and adult-infant interaction. According to P. Kuhl [1], parents who communicate with their children help them to develop an essential conversational skill of turn-taking. Infant-directed speech also has a number of unique acoustic features that aim at drawing a child's attention or 'signaling' that he / she is being talked to. Kuhl draws an interesting analogy between 'motherese' (baby talk) and birdsong showing that both serve a fundamental role of socialization. She argues that social factors affect human language to a great extent because language evolved to address a social need: to communicate with a specific listener. She points to ample evidence that shows how humans unconsciously make subtle adjustments to their speech to take the audience into account. Notice how we raise the pitch of our voice in a crowded room or adjust the prosody, clarity and tempo of speech when addressing different people. Speakers are intuitively tuned to listeners' needs and adjust their speech to accommodate them.

Therefore, the quality of native speech depends on the **communicative context** in which it is produced. Different social factors may be responsible for the variation in language production. The use of different registers results from the discrepancy in social status, age, mother tongues, native dialect, social setting, etc. As M. Saville-Troike [2] points out, this linguistic variation may occur at different levels: phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse. They may both be of standard and nonstandard nature. For example, native speakers of English may say: *I ate dinner* or *I ate supper* (variable vocabulary); *She was coming* or *She was comin'* (variable phonology); *She has sewed* or *She has sewn* (variable morphology); and *That is a big book* or *That a big book* (variable syntax); and they may respond to an introduction with *Hi* or *I am very pleased to meet you* (variable discourse).

Such inconsistent language input may cause great variation (or even confusion) in nonnative speakers. In one study, H.D. Adamson and V. Regan [3] examined the pronunciation of *-ing* in Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants in Washington DC area. Native English-speaking men tend to pronounce *-ing* as *-in'*, whereas native women are less likely to do so because of a seemingly greater sensitivity to more prestigious forms. While the Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants produced less *-in'* than native speakers overall, there is still a gender division with males producing *-in'* more than females. Adamson and Regan hypothesize that Cambodian and Vietnamese men are unconsciously trying to sound more like native-speaking men.

### Theoretical foundation

Given the learners' general sensitivity to and awareness of the characteristics of native speech production, what impact may such variation have? A substantial amount of research on the effect of social contexts has been based on the framework of **Accommodation Theory** (for details see [4, 5]). Speakers (usually unconsciously) change their pronunciation and even the grammatical complexity of sentences to sound more like whomever they are talking to. This accounts in part for why native speakers simplify their language when they communicate with (presumably) lower-level nonnative speakers and why nonnative learners may acquire different varieties of the target language (e.g. when they have different friends or teachers). Thus, the notion of 'foreigner talk' or simplification of native speaker output serves a dual purpose:

1) it 'dumbs down' the language to be more accessible for not fluent nonnative speakers;

2) it becomes the 'pattern' for nonnative speakers to acquire and may fossilize as the standard and 'normal' variant.

Since most foreign language learning occurs through formal instruction, the notion of 'foreigner talk' gave rise to a similar notion of '**teacher talk**'. R. Ellis [6] says that the language with which teachers address L2 (second language) learners is treated as a register in its own right, with its idiosyncratic formal and interactional properties. Drawing on the research done by a multitude of scholars [7–11], R. Ellis summarizes their findings as following:

1. Formal adjustments occur at all language levels. These modifications reflect those observed in foreigner talk.

2. Ungrammatical speech modifications do not occur. This is presumably because classroom setting does not allow for any deviant forms to be used.

3. Interactional adjustments occur. The linguists noticed interactional devices in teachers' speech similar to those observed in motherese (e.g. repetition, prompting, prodding, and expansions).

In summary, teacher talk in language instruction is similar to foreigner talk. An interesting phenomenon in teacher talk is how the teacher determines what level of adjustment to implement to negotiate the meaning best. Foreigner talk usually occurs in a one-to-one format, so there is plenty of feedback from the learner. One-to-one interaction also encourages (and implies) the use of extralinguistic cues. Reading these cues facilitates the processing of the native speaker's language in the most meaningful way. Traditionally, teacher talk occurs in a one-to-many setting, where the learners have few opportunities to interact with the teacher because of insufficient command of L2, a language barrier, nervousness or lack of self-confidence, peer pressure, etc. V. Henzl [9] provides data showing that teachers adjust their speech to suit the linguistic compe-

tence of the class they are teaching and such adjustments are more frequent with beginners than with advanced students.

R. Ellis [12] claims that simplified language input is essential at early stages of learning. Teachers are similar to caregivers of young children. Their speech is well-formed to ensure that the general level of their language is tuned to their learners' level. Simplified input helps to segment the speech flow into phonological and grammatical units. Those who tried to learn a foreign language know that identification of separate words and phrases is almost impossible in purely 'authentic speech'. Therefore, listening to the radio or watching television are typically of little use in the early stages.

E. Hatch [13] suggests that foreigner talk has the same basic functions as motherese. Ellis [6] adds that teacher talk has all the similar features except for the fact that fewer occurrences of nonstandard utterances have been observed. The summary of input modifications in foreigner-teacher talk is as follows (table 1).

Table 1

Input Modifications in Foreigner / Teacher Talk

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pronunciation | slowing down speech; separate words/syllable articulation; more careful pronunciation; heavier stress; increased volume on key words                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Lexis         | restricted vocabulary size; difficult items replaced with more frequently occurring items; fewer pro forms (e.g. nouns preferred to 'he', 'she', 'it'); repetition of words; use of analytic paraphrases (e.g. hammer: 'tool for hitting with'); use of gesture (e.g. ostensive definition)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Grammar       | fewer contractions; overall shorter utterance length; grammatical relations made explicit (e.g. <i>He asked to go</i> – <i>He asked if he could go</i> ); co-ordination preferred to subordination; less preverb modification; topics moved to the beginnings of utterances (e.g. <i>I like John – John, I like him</i> ); fewer WH questions and more Yes / No questions; more uninverted questions (e.g. <i>You like John?</i> ); more 'or-choice' questions; more tag questions; more present (versus non-present) temporal markings |

These output modification strategies do not occur altogether and largely depend on the type of a lesson too. Subject lessons involving L2 students typically contain fewer lexical adjustments, perhaps because the choice of vocabulary is determined by the subject content of the lessons. Thus, adjustments in subject lessons are not meant to teach L2 to students but are triggered by the attempt to share content information.

The simplification occurs not only at the level of pronunciation, lexis and grammar. There are a number of certain discourse tactics that teachers implement to negotiate meaning in L2 classrooms.

Another theory that plays an essential role in this work is the **Comprehensible Input Hypothesis** [14]. S. Krashen defined 'comprehensible input' as a bit of language that is read / heard and is slightly ahead of the learner's

current proficiency level ( $i+1$ ). Language that has structures that learners understand completely has no impact on acquisition per se. However, if the output (what the learner hears) has some unfamiliar bits but is still overall understandable, it triggers the learner's acquisition device (and turns into comprehensible input). Krashen considers the Input Hypothesis to be pivotal to all of acquisition and to have plentiful implications for the classroom.

1) Speaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. Speech cannot be taught directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input.

2) If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The teacher's main role is to ensure that students receive comprehensible input.

The Accommodation Theory and the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis provide two lenses which allow to investigate NS teachers' language directed at NNS students: one suggesting a certain level of modification to simplify the output for learners and the other restricting the modification for the purposes of effective comprehension (how much simplification is sufficient for successful interaction).

### **Participants and methodology**

The aim of this paper is to apply the summative features of teacher talk to real-life L2 classroom data and observe how NS teachers modify their speech to negotiate the meaning. No teachers who participated in this study were explicitly asked to simplify their speech. Thus, the data could show that NS unconsciously make adjustments to their language in an attempt to be understood by NNS. This innate feature of communicative cooperation is well-illustrated in studies of motherese [15–21].

The data were collected in Beginner level ESL classrooms at a university in upstate NY. The teachers were 2 male and 1 female graduate students in the TESOL Master's program – all native speakers of English. No teachers had prior experience of working with LEP (limited in English proficiency) students. The ESL program consisted of 6 weeks of evening classes three times a week. The Beginner level group had 5 female students in it.

The teacher-student classroom interactions were audio recorded in six 45-min classes, amounting to 4.5 hours in total. Due to some background noise and heavy accents of NNS, their utterances are marked as 'unclear.' Nonetheless, the purpose of this study is to examine teacher talk, and learners' language is of less importance here. To protect their privacy, the teachers are nicknamed T1, T2 and T3. The names of some students appearing in the transcript have been changed as well.

The recorded data consist of two classes led by each teacher. The themes of T1's classes were 'Transportation' and 'In the Town'. T2 dis-

cussed 'Family and Relationships' and 'Appearance'. T3 discussed the topic of 'Money' and 'Health'. The teachers mainly used visual aids (pictures, drawings on blackboard, PowerPoint slides, etc.) to introduce the new vocabulary or elicit the words that the students already knew.

The teachers' work with students was highly interactive. Although I had an impression that some teachers had expected the learners to have a better understanding of the topic, they employed various strategies to elicit as much prior knowledge from the students as possible. Students' level of English was low; therefore, their production was minimal. However, they could follow the teachers' train of thought without fail, as they could understand more than they could produce.

Unfortunately, the excerpts from the teachers did not provide an equal amount of data that is relevant to this study. Therefore, some teachers' excerpts appear more often than others.

### Findings

All the audio recordings were transcribed to reveal interactive patterns in the speech of the teachers and students. The transcripts were then analyzed with a view to finding specific discursive features discussed below.

***Rephrasing and Repetition.*** In his lesson on vehicles, T1 introduced new vocabulary – various names of vehicles (e.g. sedan, sports car, van, etc.). His pedagogic technique was not to simply provide the vocabulary but to use visual aid to find out how much the learners already knew. For this reason, T1's speech contained a lot of questioning and rephrasing.

(1) T1: Number 16

(2) Ss: Umm... it's a bus?

(3) T1: Umm... Actually... I guess you could call it a type of bus... but... um... what do you do (4) in that sort of vehicle? What is it used for?

(5) Ss: (pause)

(6) T1: In which locations do you use something similar to that? What is it used for? ...No? (7) Ok... that's a hard one. That's a hard one... umm... because it's a little more unusual. We (8) should call that an RV. An RV...

(9) Ss: House in a car

(10) T1: That's right! That's what I was trying to get Mary to say!

T1 rephrases his question in an attempt to make it more understandable and at the same time elicit a correct response. He points to different features of the vehicle (its similarity to buses, its function, location of use) to assist with conjuring up its image and, consequently, the right word.

(1) T1: Whose turn...? Natalie.

(2) Ss: It's a van... van

(3) T1: It is a van! It is a van! You guys got the concept of what the vehicles are. Because you (4) know when it's a truck... you know it's a van.

Ok... this is a van but what type? What type (5) of van is this? What's particular about that type of van?

(6) Ss: Mmmm

(7) T1: What makes it different?

(8) Ss: It's a little...

(9) T1: It's a little small.

(10) Ss: Yes

(11) T1: Ok. It's a little small. Ok. So how we call... what's the name we give in English for (12) the vans that are not big vans but... they are a little smaller?

(13) Ss: Mini van

(14) T1: That's what it's called. It's a mini van.

(15) Ss: Mini van.

(16) T1: It's a mini van. Ok.

To assist the students with understanding the terminology and maintaining the flow of the lesson, T1 uses the novel word repeatedly in various types of sentences and places it in various syntactic positions within the sentences (subject, object, subject nominative):

(1) Ss: It's a truck?

(2) T1: No we don't consider that one a truck. Anyone else wants to give it a shot? That is a van. That is a regular van. As opposed to the mini-van. You seen a mini-van? The mini-van is much smaller. That's a van. (pause) Ok. Whose turn is it? I got lost.

In an attempt to make their language (or output) more comprehensible and, thus, ensure 'comprehensible input' ESL teachers have an array of synonyms or antonyms for the target word at hand. These lexical resources help to illustrate the same concept in various terms and colorfully express one idea. In addition, this technique increases the likelihood of students' successful comprehension by providing several lexemes of different complexity and formality to select from:

(1) Ss: I seen this

(2) T1: You've seen this before. Well can you explain to me what... what makes it...

(3) What makes it special... different... particular?

In his class on appearance, T2's repetitions not only helped the students to remember words by imitating his pronunciation but also to use it meaningfully as they understand the concept:

(1) T2: He has a crew-cut. Remember?

(2) Ss: Crew-cut

(3) T2: Yes. ...Do you remember crew-cut?

(4) Ss: No

(5) T2: No? Ok. Let's see.

(6) Ss: Crew-cut

(7) T2: Let me show you crew-cut. (looking for a slide) Do you remember this boy?

(8) Ss: Crew-cut

(9) T2: He has a crew-cut

(10) Ss: Oh... crew-cut

(11) T2: Yes.

(12) Ss: Oh yes

(13) T2: The boy on the left ... He has a crew-cut. Exactly. Ok.

Lines 2, 6, and 8 indicate a simple imitation of the word, whereas line 10 displays a recognition of the lexeme and a change in the students' knowledge state, signaled by the discourse marker 'oh' [22].

**Expansion and True Questions.** T1 constantly tried to elicit the name of the vehicles from the students themselves, thus, making his lesson less teacher-centered. However, it is difficult to place more focus on students when their language skills are limited. The classroom discourse at the beginner level is mainly constructed by the teacher and the percentage of student talk is low. The verbal exchange follows the typical format: *Teacher Question (Initiation), Student Response and Teacher Evaluation*, which J.L. Lemke [23] calls a **triadic dialogue**. This communicative act doesn't always follow the same script and may have other steps, e.g. Teacher Preparation, Teacher Call for Bids, Student Bid to Answer, Nominalization, Teacher Elaboration, etc. The data used in this paper show that Teacher Elaboration is an important means to help students shape grammatically correct answers.

(1) T1: The City Hall... Oh... The City Hall (writes on board)... City... Hall... What's the City (2) Hall, Mary?

(3) Ss: Where they... judge... jus... (unclear)

(4) T1: The judge. The judge ... The judge? That's also... that's also where the government (5) ...See question marks on people's faces? The judge. The judge sits in the courtroom.

[6] Ss: The courtroom.

T1 'picks up' the student's incomplete answer and completes it and, in addition to that, elaborates on it in line 5.

Although this strategy is not mentioned in Hatch's table of Interactional discourse tactics (table 2), it is commonly implemented in L2 classrooms. Mothers use the same verbal rephrasing when they talk with their kids. In this technique of **expansion**, an adult imitates, expands on or adds to the child's statement. Z.O. Weizman and C.E. Snow's [24] findings show that expansion facilitates language development, including vocabulary. J.N. Bohannon and L. Stanowicz [25] say that parents are especially likely to use this expansion strategy after a child has made a grammatical error.

Table 2

**Interactional Strategies in ESL classroom**

| Type                        | Description                                                                                                           | Example                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| More 'here-and-now' topics  | NS refers to objects / events which are contiguous                                                                    | NS: What's that you are wearing?                                                   |
| More topic-initiation moves | NS starts a conversational topic by asking a question or making a comment                                             | NS: I think this is makeup on her.<br>NNS: Oh<br>NS: Women use this... eye shadow. |
| More confirmation checks    | Utterances designed to elicit confirmation that a learner utterance has been correctly heard or understood            | NNS: I went to cinema.<br>NS: The cinema?                                          |
| More comprehension checks   | Attempts by the NS to establish that the learner is following what he is saying                                       | NS: It was raining cats and dogs. Do you follow?                                   |
| More clarification requests | Utterances designed to get the learner to clarify an utterance which has not been heard or understood                 | NNS: She very high<br>NS: Sorry?                                                   |
| More self-repetitions       | The NS repeats parts or the whole of his preceding utterance                                                          | NS: She got stuck in the window trying to get in. She got stuck                    |
| More other-repetitions      | The NS repeats part or the whole of the learner's previous utterance without seeking confirmation                     | NNS: I went to the cinema.<br>NS: Yeah. You went to the cinema                     |
| More expansions             | The NS expands the learner's previous utterance by supplying missing formatives or by adding new semantic information | NNS: I wear a sweater.<br>NS: Yes, you are wearing a red sweater                   |
| Shorter responses           | The NS restricts the length of his response to a learner question or comment                                          | NNS: How you feeling today?<br>NS: Good. Good                                      |

Here's an example of expansion from T1's class:

(1) T1: What makes it different?

(2) Ss: It's a little...

(3) T1: It's a little small.

(4) Ss: Yes

(5) T1: Ok. It's a little small. Ok.

The following excerpt, however, shows a different technique of expansion.

(1) Ss: His face (unclear)... tattoo.

(2) T2: His face has a lot of tattoos. Ok. Well, I'm not sure. Ok. What else did you... say

(3) about him?

(4) Ss: (unclear)... what do you call..?

- (5) T2: Teeth  
 (6) Ss: Teeth  
 (7) T2: Teeth  
 (8) Ss: Teeth... a hole... I don't know  
 (9) T2: Yes... He has a space. A space.  
 (10) Ss: Space... teeth  
 (11) T2: A space  
 (12) Ss: Space  
 (13) T2: This is the word... Here... space... S-P-A-C-E (writes on board).  
 He has a space (14)... in between his teeth. His front teeth have a big space.  
 (15) Ss: Oh

T2 deliberately chooses not to expand on the student's word 'hole' because it was the wrong lexeme to use in this context. Instead, he suggests a semantically appropriate variant, making subsequent repetitions and giving its graphic representation.

Generally, expansion is a type of grammatical rephrasing that illustrates what the utterance would sound like if made by a NS (lines 1 and 2, 4 and 5, 10 and 11).

- (1) Ss: I seen this  
 (2) T1: You've seen this before. Well can you explain to me what ... what makes it...  
 (3) What makes it special... different... particular?  
 (4) Ss: For singers.  
 (5) T1: For the singers?  
 (6) Ss: Yes.  
 (7) T1: Stars?  
 (8) Ss: Yes.  
 (9) T1: So then it'd make it an expensive vehicle.  
 (10) Ss: When I go to wedding  
 (11) T1: When you go to a wedding.

T1's expansion of students' answers serves the purpose of the confirmation check mentioned in the Table 2. It is also a kind of a repetition or comprehension check because other students may not have heard or understood the utterance. This technique also expands the typical IRE structure of the dialogue between the teacher and students. The Initiation is still in the form of a teacher question. The Student Response, however, initiates a Teacher Elaboration in the form of expansion, which is followed by a Student Evaluation. It seems like this Elaboration gives students some authority in assessing the teacher's ability to understand students' production. This Student Evaluation is an important tool for establishing a mutual understanding between the instructor and learners.

Here is another example of the Initiation – Response – Teacher Elaboration – Student Evaluation act:

- (1) T1: And... number 29.
- (2) Ss: Number 29. it is a... umm... it is a van
- (3) T1: Ummm... a van you said?
- (4) Ss: A little van
- (5) T1: A little van. A little van?
- (6) Ss: Yes... (unclear)
- (7) T1 (laughing): Yes that was a little difficult. It's called the station wagon. (T1 writes on the board). That takes us to number 30.

Lines 5 and 7 in the previous excerpt and 3 and 5 in this one are examples of the so-called true questions. Ellis [12] claims that most teacher questions are of the display variety, i.e. designed to test and, therefore, have predetermined answers rather than of the referential kind, i.e. truly information-seeking and permitting 'open' answers. Display questions are 'less likely to contribute to an acquisition-rich environment than referential questions'. In the excerpt, T1 asks these questions because he doesn't know the answers. Thus, his role changes from an information-giver to an information-seeker.

J.L. Lemke [23] describes True Dialogue as a communicative event in which a teacher asks a student's opinion, or asks for a real-life experience or asks a question that may have a number of possible answers. Such dialogues do not trigger a Teacher Evaluation move but may result in an optional Teacher Comment. For example:

- (1) T1: Number 24.
- (2) Ss: Small car
- (3) T1: A small car. Ok... umm... Who likes these types of cars?
- (4) Ss: Amanda
- (5) T1: You like it? (laughter) Why you like it? Because it's flashy?  
(laughter) Yes, it
- (6) is a car but... it's... it's a certain type of car. What type of car?  
Anybody want to
- (7) guess?
- (8) Ss: Sports car
- (9) T1: That's exactly what it is.

Although T1 suggested an answer to his own question at Line 5, these true referential questions are one of the few instances of shifting the 'chalk and talk' focus of the class to engaging the students in a more meaningful interaction which includes their interests and ideas.

**Glossing.** Lemke described *glossing* as a frequent technique of teacher language 'in which a teacher restates what he has just said in a way that informally defines it or gives it meaning, usually by making it equivalent to a more familiar expression' [Ibid. P. 111]. Despite being used by Lemke in relation to science classroom, glossing emerges in ESL classroom discourse too. Teachers implement this technique when the introduction of a complex concept or lexeme is too challenging for students, thus, encouraging teachers

to provide more comprehensible examples, preferably connected to their real life experience. Unfamiliar expressions could be substituted by familiar references to facilitate the understanding of a novel concept:

- (1) Ss: She has... (unclear) hair.
- (2) T2: She has...
- (3) Ss: Sliver... sliver... is it color that is... sliver? (wrong pronunciation)
- (4) T2: The color is not silver. It's called blonde.
- (5) Ss: Oh.
- (6) T2: Remember, Melissa has blonde hair?
- (7) Ss: Oh... blonde.
- (8) T2: Yes. This woman has blonde hair.

After noticing that the students did not remember the word 'blonde', T2 used 'Melissa' as a reference to help the students remember the object to which 'blonde' was attached. Melissa's hair color was used as an impromptu mnemonic technique to help to connect the known with the unknown in the classroom. This way, T2 glossed the unfamiliar term with a familiar reference facilitating the comprehension of the former.

A more explicit instance of glossing is found in one T1's excerpt in which he attempts to explain what an RV is. T1 used a brand name that the students were not familiar with, which initiated a chain of sentences, each aimed at glossing the other:

(1) T1: That's right! That's what I was trying to get Mary to say! Yes... it's sort of... it's sort of (2)... it's a home. What... Actually this is an acronym. We say 'RV'. Many Americans... many (3) Americans actually don't even use the term 'RV'. They say Winnebago. Winnebago is

(4) actually a brand. It's a brand that has become a way of designating this sort of vehicle.

(5) Sort of like... when you say 'pampers'. You are talking about diapers. Pampers is actually (6) a brand... you know pampers? When the... when the brand is something that becomes a (7) name so... in English.. here... In America... we often say that's a Winnebago. But it's an

(8) RV. And an RV is an acronym for 'recreational'... it's a big word... (writing on the board)

(9) 'recreational vehicle'...ok? And... um... like Mary said that's a vehicle that's um... is (10) basically a home. It's used... um... here in the States a lot to... go, for example, to the (11) national parks. Remember we spoke about parks... the other day?... well... Well big (12) parks here in the States... you'll see a lot of RVs... umm... Next one... who's up? Whose (13) turn..? Natalie.

The sentences at lines 3 and 4 introduce a novel lexeme. This lexeme, in turn, starts the following sentence. Such alternation was shown in T1's speech before and is evidently an explanatory technique, as it follows a typical topic-comment structure (the *comment* of one sentence becomes *topic* of

the next one). The teacher's goal is to explain the term 'Winnebago' by a simpler term 'brand'. However, the students do not show any signs of understanding, so he proceeds by using 'pampers – diapers' as a parallel example. Lack of responsiveness from the students urges him to make use of 'You know 'pampers'?' as a comprehension check. In this case, glossing does not accomplish its goal of explaining a complex novel term by way of simpler ones because the 'simpler' terms are still not familiar to the students.

**Personal Pronouns.** Personal pronouns are crucial in interpersonal communication. Speakers can use pronouns to either distinguish themselves from addressees or create a sense of solidarity or affinity with them. In his research into pronouns in mathematics talk, T. Rowland has found that teachers use 'we' to establish their authority and force students to conform to practices that are accepted by the community of 'the knowledgeable', thus, "giving priority to conformity over comprehension" [26. P. 24]. In identifying with the 'expert' group, teachers have a preference for 'we' over 'you' in the negotiation of general concepts.

A similar case of 'we' can be seen in the following excerpt in T1's classroom:

(1) T1: That's a hard one... umm... because it's a little more unusual.  
We should call

(2) that an RV. An RV...

(3) Ss: House in a car

(4) T1: That's right! That's what I was trying to get Mary to say!  
Yes... it's sort of...

(5) It's sort of ... it's a home. What... Actually this is an acronym. We say 'RV'.

(6) Many Americans... many Americans actually don't even use the term 'RV'.

(7) They say Winnebago.

The 'we' at line 1 is what discourse analysts call "solidarity-promoting 'we'". P. Rounds points out that by using 'we', teachers can "signal solidarity with their students while covertly maintaining a certain semblance of power" [27. P. 649]. However, T1's solidarity with the students alters as his need to show a sense of belonging to the group of NS experts that excludes the students arises (line 5). This authoritative use of 'we' leaves no doubt for NNS that 'RV' is the correct term. However, line 6 shows a withdrawal from the previous 'expert' statement, which is immediately displayed by a non-inclusive 'they' in line 7.

Here are more examples of an expert 'we':

(1) Ss: It's a truck?

(2) T1: No we don't consider that one a truck. Anyone else wants to give it a shot? That is a

(3) van. That is a regular van. As opposed to the mini-van. You seen a mini-van? The mini-

(4) van is much smaller. That's a van. (pause) Ok. Whose turn is it? I got lost.

(1) T1: Now I'm going to... (pause). That's right. What we have here is a type of vehicle. I

(2) want you to complete this exercise. You see I numbered each vehicle. Ummm. I want you (3) guys to... as a matter of fact we're gonna erase it... (erases words from the board) I want (4) you to match the numbers to the exact vehicle.

The implicit directive 'I'm going to...' is softened by 'we' in line 1. However, T1 continues with an explicit directive 'I want you to'. T1 wants to have the students match the new words for vehicles with the pictures of vehicles. After realizing that he spelled a lot of new words on the board, he uses 'we' to create an impression of a mutual agreement that the words have to be erased.

Furthermore, T1 conveniently detaches himself from the community of experts when pointing to their 'ignorance':

(1) T1: The same way this is an acronym. An RV. So is this. This is actually an

(2) acronym. Even though most people don't even remember what it means. They use

(3) it so much as SUV. They forget what it means... what it means is 'sport utility

(4) vehicle'. It's the vehicle of choice for families. It uses a lot of gasoline. It's not

(5) too very environmentally friendly... ummm... who's next? Who's next? You? Go

(6) ahead.

He switched to pronoun 'they' (lines 2, 3) to show that he does not belong to those who do not know what SUV stands for. This would undermine his authoritative status as an 'expert' instructor.

Another solidarity-promoting 'we' can be observed in the teacher talk of T3:

(1) T3: So, the doctor asks you 'how are you feeling?'. Do we know how to answer that?

(2) Ss: Yes.

This preference to 'we' over 'you' is an example of teachers' degree of certainty about whether the students know the answer. The pronoun 'you' would make it the students' responsibility to have the correct answer, but 'we' acts as an offer of assistance in case students don't know what to say. A.W. Oliveira et al. [28] claim that such inclusive forms of personal pro-

nouns have potential that can help instructors to include themselves into the students' perspective, thus leading to the creation of a single social category.

**Comprehensible Input Problem.** Despite its drawbacks (for details see [6, 29]), Krashen's Input Hypothesis has been influential in the second language acquisition theory for decades. S. Krashen and M.H. Long have argued strongly that the availability of comprehensible input is essential before the learner's internal processing mechanism can work. Long [30] discusses in detail how input can be made comprehensible or accessible to NNS learners. One way is to use structures and vocabulary that the learner already knows. However, it means that this input will have little impact on learners' L2 acquisition. Another way is to focus on 'here-and-now' narratives, which enables the learners to make use of the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts and their general knowledge to interpret unfamiliar language. A third way is through the modification of the interaction with L2 learners.

T1, T2 and T3 each worked with the L2 students only 3 nights a week, which is an insufficient time to gauge how far and wide the learners' proficiency stretches. Thus, the negotiation of meaning in their classrooms was modified impromptu, i.e. when the students' reaction to novel material was zero or minimal. When the teachers 'violated' the 'i+1' formula of Krashen (the input should be only slightly beyond the learner's actual knowledge to facilitate the learning) – for example, when their new vocabulary was too complicated for the L2 learners to understand – they often embarked on lengthy monologues trying their best to get the message across. A good example of this 'i+1' violation is in T2's class on 'Family,' where he and the students worked on a Simpson's Family Tree worksheet:

(1) T2: Yes, so... Selma is Ling's mother. But we say adoptive... adoptive... remember, we (2) talked about this yesterday? A little. We didn't get into it too much but... it's when...

(3) Remember, you asked me a question is it expensive to... you adopt someone... um... (4) like I go to Russia... and I want... um... my wife and I cannot have any children. We

(5) have a problem with the body. You understand this?

(6) Ss: Yeah

(7) T2: Ok. We have a problem and it's not possible for my wife and I to have any children. So (8) ...but we want a child... very bad. We want a child. So, we adopt a child. We adopt. A

(9) child... an orphan. Remember the word 'orphan' from yesterday? 'Orphan', yes. We

(10) learned about this word yesterday. There was a whole slide on 'orphan'. Yes, I'll show [11] you. You'll remember when I... remember? What is an orphan? An orphan... right... is (12) a child without any parents. Why? Because the parents are...

(13) Ss: Dec...

(14) T2: Deceased.

(15) Ss: Deceased

(16) T2: Remember? Dead. So, if there is an orphan... with no parents... me and my wife (17) can adopt the child. Ok? For example. Ok?.. (laughter)

T2 uses the term 'adoptive' but the students do not react as if they are familiar with the word. He attempts an explanation, but it is hard to do without using the term itself (lines 3–5). Therefore, he makes up an example involving him and his wife to illustrate what 'adoptive' means. T2 has a choice between trying to explain adoption in more formal terms and simplifying its meaning by giving a real life example. Thus, he modifies the input until it fits into the 'i+1' model. The students could relate to the "body problems", being unable to have children, and children (orphans) whose parents are dead (lines 7–16).

T3's lesson on 'Health' also has a thorny point when she tries to explain what a 'pain scale' is. She shows the students a scale with a line of faces on it – from happy to sad:

(1) T3: In the doctor's office and in the ER they'll ask you... especially, if you go and say 'I

(2) have pain' or 'Something hurts'... They give you this... They ask you... It's called the

(3) 'pain...' ...um... I don't know if there is a real word for it... It's a pain scale. They use

(4) this... This is called... It's called a pain scale (writes on board)... pain... scale

(5) Ss: Pain scale

(6) T3: Pain scale

T3's explanation is successful after all but this excerpt shows how much confusion 'i+2' modification can cause when a teacher is not capable to quickly think of other words to explain a seemingly simple thing.

When trying to describe what a sports car is, T1 characterizes the vehicle in terms of its function, popularity, shape, power capacity, etc. He even resorts to a jargon term 'muscle' referring to the car's power. T1 points to many features of the sports car in just a matter of seconds, making sure the students have a mental image of the vehicle (which they can also see in their worksheet) and a conceptual image of what makes this vehicle different from others:

(1) T1: No... sports car... it can be used for racing... but ummm... there's probably a few

(2) sports cars right here... in the parking lot. Anything that has... ummm... that has that... (3) ummm... racey shape... they have stronger engines... These sorts of cars. So they

(4) have more muscle... they have more power.

One of the criticisms of the Input Hypothesis is that the problem of comprehensibility of input is hard to resolve. Despite being in the same Beginner group, the students did not have the same level of L2 proficiency. Cultural differences should also be taken into account because, while trying to negotiate the meaning of certain novel terms, teachers use extralinguistic cues that are not universal across cultures. Students of various backgrounds could have difficulty identifying those cues and making sense of them. Moreover, explanatory skills could pose a challenge to language educators; a good skill of explaining unfamiliar terms with familiar references is very hard to master. Some teachers could have trouble clarifying certain terms or phenomena that are taken for granted in the target culture.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this paper was to explore the concept of teacher talk and apply its features to the data collected in a few beginner ESL classrooms. While only some of the characteristics of teacher talk were taken into consideration, the data provided plenty examples of those that were of interest.

Teachers put a lot of effort negotiating meaning in ESL classrooms, making use of any possible explanatory technique they have. These techniques are not specific to classroom environments but are inherent in our endeavor to be understandable and understood. Therefore, mothers repeat novel words to their babies over and over again modifying their voice, putting these words in different parts of the sentence to simply draw attention to the new term and reinforce its retention in memory. Teachers not only repeat but also rephrase new vocabulary in an attempt to make it more comprehensible and accessible. They make sure the new material is understood by making confirmation checks in the form of questions or asking students to repeat the words or use them in context. To provide students with the contexts of authentic usage of the new item, teachers expand on them, thus, creating such contexts on the spot. This technique is useful in both teacher talk and infant-directed speech because teachers and mothers can safely use expansion to correct non-grammatical or illiterate speech. To ensure the comprehension of a new word, teachers gloss its unfamiliar meaning with familiar references, often giving students a real-life object to relate to. Pronouns in teacher talk can serve both as tools for creating an atmosphere of solidarity with or separation from the community of students. In their attempts to negotiate the meaning, teachers often have trouble simplifying the input so much that it could be easily processed by L2 learners. Some possible obstacles could be lack of common ground with the students, different cultural heritage, and variation in linguistic background and life experience.

All teachers in this study have shown varying degrees of teacher talk implementation in their L2 classrooms. The number of teacher talk techniques also depends on the content of the lesson and the type of activities. For instance, T3's class focused on independent learning or learning in groups with minimal teacher-student interaction. Therefore, her classes did not provide sufficient samples of various teacher talk features.

The possible orientation of the future research in the area of teacher talk or 'teacherese' (author's coinage) could be towards age sensitivity of students to such interaction, the nature of student intake (the input that has been processed) or reaction to the novel language when it is oversimplified, the politeness strategies of teachers while using teacher talk and student reactions to their teachers 'talking down' to them when they accommodate or 'dumb down' their speech.

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*Received 27 February 2017*

#### РАЗГОВОР УЧИТЕЛЯ: ДИСКУРСИВНЫЕ МЕТОДЫ В ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА КАК ИНОСТРАННОГО

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DOI: 10.17223/19996195/37/9

**Аннотация.** Исследуются особенности педагогического дискурса как типа речи преподавателя, направленной на обучающихся во время проведения аудиторных занятий. В стенограммах взаимодействий преподаватель – обучающийся при проведении вечер-

него курса английского языка как второго был выявлен ряд приемов, позволяющих сделать общение в диаде учитель – студент эффективным. Инструкторы часто прибегают к таким приемам, как повторение, парафраз сказанного, расширение своих высказываний и актуальные вопросы, а также пояснения (на основе доступных обучающимся металингвистических ассоциаций) с привлечением незнакомых референций. Кроме того, преподаватели могут использовать личные местоимения для отождествления себя с обучающимися или отделения себя от своих учеников. Это исследование будет полезно для начинающих преподавателей английского языка, а также для практикующих преподавателей, которые намерены изучить собственные коммуникативные практики во время занятий.

**Ключевые слова:** речь преподавателя; приемы беседы; общение учитель – ученик; коммуникативные практики.