



Research Paper

# The Influence of Teacher Talk on Student's Oral Output in Chinese EFL Classroom

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**ABSTRACT:** As modified input, teacher talk has various functions such as explaining the learning materials and controlling the classroom, so its influence on the EFL classroom has always been concerned by many researchers. Through the research of previous literature and case study, this paper aims to find out the most common functions of teacher talk in EFL classroom, and the influence of different functions of teacher talk on students' oral output. The study found that teacher talk does not play a single function in EFL classroom. On the contrary, teacher talk has many functions and plays different roles in students' oral English expression. The purpose of this study is to provide reference for English teachers' teaching and help English teachers make better use of teachers' discourse in the classroom, so as to effectively help students to improve their oral production, and then improve their English proficiency.

**KEYWORDS:** Teacher Talk; Oral Output; Chinese EFL Class

Received 10 Oct., 2023; Revised 22 Oct., 2023; Accepted 24 Oct., 2023 © The author(s) 2023. Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Krashen's input hypothesis, input is vital to second language acquisition, and the way to promote SLA/ FLA is providing necessary input. In class settings, teacher talk plays the role as one of the noticeable input for the foreign language learners[1].

Chinese students have learnt English for more than 10 years in class, but the oral performance of Chinese students is not very satisfying. However, with the development of society, it requires English teaching pay more attention to the communicative competence of students, and the oral output of the English learners in Chinese class have been more important in nowadays[2]. For instance, in Guangdong province, English oral production has been included in college matriculation, in the proportion of 10% of the total score. For high school students, the improvement of Chinese EFL students' oral output is necessary, especially for the need of communicating and for the sake of college matriculation.

The study intends to find out how different functions of teacher talk can influence students' oral output of Chinese high school students in the class setting environment, and thus give some pedagogical implications for the EFL teaching to promote the oral performance of Chinese high school students.

To be more specific, this research focuses on the following two research questions:

- (1) In class settings, what are the main functions of teacher talks?
- (2) In class settings, how students' oral output is influenced by teacher talk ?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will be handled by observing published teaching video. The chosen video is from "the 3rd National Basic Education English Classroom Teaching Reform High-end Forum and 'Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou' famous teachers' English reading and writing integration and effective teaching observation seminar." The classes are filmed and published and the students in the class are all at the stage of high school, which fit the goal of the study. This seminar had gathered teachers and educators from the most prominent provinces in China, where not only the economy but also the education excels the nation. In this sense the observation of the seminar is worthwhile and meaningful. However, owing to the time limitation, the whole seminar will not be observed, and only one representative class will be observed and analyzed.

The chosen class is a writing class lectured by John Swift, who is a male English teacher at the Shanghai School. The students are high school students and are divided into five groups, with five members in each

group. The topic of the class is writing an argumentative writing in support of the single sex school or mixed school.

The video of classroom teaching will be carefully observed and transcribed. The conversations between teacher and students will be paid specially attention. After transcribing the whole class, the language that teacher uses in the EFL class and students' oral language will be examined precisely.

Frequency analysis will be used in order to analyze the collected data. The author will first read through the transcription of the whole class, and then mark out the different functions that the teacher talk has displayed. After labeling the script, the type of function will be counted in terms of the frequency of occurrence, and then the top three most frequently used functions will be presented. The analysis of the teacher talk will focus on the top three function in the classroom.

After dealing with the teacher talk, next step is analyzing students' oral output. The analysis of students' oral output will be handled in terms of:

- *fluency*;
- *accuracy*;
- *complexity*.

The analysis of fluency will be based on the speech rate of each word, and the pauses less than 1.5 seconds will be viewed as the improvement of the fluency [3]. The analysis of the accuracy will be based on the grammaticality of the sentence. The analysis of the complexity will be worked on the variety of vocabularies and the complexity of syntax [4].

The comparison of students' oral output will be made before and after the teacher talk. When a student first makes an answer, the performances will be analyzed and then will be compared with the later performances after the teacher using language to interact with the student, and thus to find out what are the influences of teacher talk and whether it has improved the oral output of students.

The analysis includes two aspects:

- *One aspect is relating to teacher talks, including what are the main function of teacher talk displayed in the pedagogical video, and what are the influences on students' oral output in EFL class;*
- *The other aspect is concerning to students' oral output, including how students' oral output will be affected and whether it will be improved or not under the influences of teacher talk. The targeted function of teacher talk that will be analyzed will be chosen based on the frequency that mostly occur in the pedagogical video. And the analysis of students' oral output will be operated in terms of their fluency, accuracy and complexity.*

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the pedagogical video and transcription, the teacher talks that occur in the conversation between teacher and students have been categorized according to previous definitions and classification in chapter two. Based on the number of times the functions occur, the top three functions happening in the pedagogical class are interrogation function, feedback function, and supporting function, each occurring 49, 41, and 26 times. Besides the top three functions, following are explaining function, with 19 times of occurrence; the function of controlling the class, with 18 times of occurrence; supplementary function with 13 times of occurrence; instructing function, with 6 times of occurrence; the correcting function, with 5 times of occurrence; code-switching, with 3 times of occurrence, and phatic communication, with 1 time of occurrence.

interrogation function	49 times of occurrence
feedback function	41 times of occurrence
supporting function	26 times of occurrence
explaining function	19 times of occurrence
controlling the class	18 times of occurrence
supplementary function	13 times of occurrence
instructing function	6 times of occurrence
correcting function	5 times of occurrence
code-switching	3 times of occurrence
phatic communication	1 time of occurrence

**Table 1**

According to the statistics, the following sections will focus on the top three functions that occur in in-class communication, which are the interrogation function, feedback function and the supporting function.

### 3.1 Function 1: Interrogation Function

According to Tian, "Interrogation is regarded as a verbal or written utterance which seeks response from the listener or reader" [5]. Interrogation is one of the main functions of teacher talk, by interrogation and question-

ing, teacher can have the knowledge of that whether students have understood and mastered the learning materials, and thus controlling the teaching process[6]. Questioning enables teachers to arouse students' learning interest, encourage them to focus on the teaching contents and check their understanding of the knowledge [5]. Interrogation is the most common pedagogical technique, and the quality of interrogation have direct influences on the interaction between teacher and students [7].

There are 49 times of interrogation in Mr. Swift's class. In the beginning of the class, Mr. Swift uses several closed questions to arise students' interests with the presentation of his Power Points. Questions like "what are they doing?" "How about this one?" "Do you know drama?" "Do you know the name of the sports?" are used to interact with students and thus, successfully introduce himself to students.

Interrogation provides teacher the chance to know the language competence of students. Through the answers of students, teacher can know whether students have master certain vocabularies. For example, when Mr. Swift showed the students a photo about playing drama, and asked them what were the people in the photo doing. The students answered with the word "dancing" instead of "performing", which was an inaccurate answer. Then Mr. Swift replied them with the exact word "drama". It is apparently that the students did not have a good mastery of the word drama. Facing with the photo concerning to the word, they could not recall the exact word in their mind and uttered it correctly. By interrogating, Mr. Swift could be able to have the idea that the students may lack of some knowledge of certain vocabularies, and thus he could make some additional explanation to the students. And after the explanation and correction of Mr. Swift, the students could use the word "drama" in response to the picture on PPT, which was an improvement of accuracy.

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T	:	How about this one?
Ss	:	Dancing
T	:	Dancing? They seem like performing. Wow. What are they doing? They are having a drama lesson. Do you know drama?
Ss	:	Drama.
T	:	<i>Xiju</i> . Yes. Because girls tend to be emotional, so we offer such a kind of courses to students. How about this one? They are dancing...

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### Example 1

One of the prominent characteristics of Mr. Swift's interrogation is that Mr. Swift often directly calls for students' names to answer questions, or asking volunteers to do so. From the collected data, it can be counted that there are 14 times that Mr. Swift calls for students to answer question, some of them are drawn in the example below. Interrogation can provide the students chances to do their oral presentation. By calling students' name or asking volunteers to answer the question, the pointed students can have the chance to answer the questions and feels obliged to give an oral presentation, which may encourage them to express themselves.

And also, calling students' names could not only draw the attention of the pointed student, but also the students who are not pointed. For instance, when Mr. Swift called the student "How about Leo? Hey. How would you match the five paragraphs with the candy structure?" Hearing the teacher calling some student's name, other students turned their head to see Leo, and listened to what Leo said. When Leo was called, he stood up immediately and ready for making his answer. This shows how interrogation can absorb students' attention.

Although the non-pointed students do not have to present themselves, they will also bear in mind the question and see whether the answer that are told by the pointed student are right or wrong. Oral presentation are student-centered language tasks, when students are required to do oral presentation, they are able to choose what they want to present in their talks as well as how they present their answer to their peers and teacher, and thus students who do oral presentation can learn to use English in an integrated way [9]. It is clear that in Mr. Swift's class, by displaying the interrogative function of teacher talk, the time that students make oral output is plentiful, which is beneficial for the students to practice their oral English

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Line 22	T : How about George?
Line 28	T : How about Charlie?
Line 30	T : How about Chloe?
Line 41	T : How about Leo? How would you match the five paragraphs with the candy structure?
Line 50	T : How about Thoreau. Would you?

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Line 65	T	: So any volunteer? What are the two... Oh Doris, please?
Line 69	T	: Cathy, what would you do?
Line 71	T	: What else can we do, Oscar?
Line 100	T	: Why, why they may not try some of the hobbies in mixed school according to Cindy? Yeah Max.
Line 102	T	: Yes, please. Tiffany, right?
Line 123	T	: And who else? Cote.
Line 129	T	: And who else? Christine.
Line 131	T	: Who else? Oh Chloe.
Line 133	T	: And who else? Let's have one more. Taylor.
Line 142	T	: Who? Any volunteer? Cathy, do you please come here and have a try?

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**Example 2**

**3.2 Function 2: Feedback Function**

According to Longmen dictionary, feedback refers to “advice, criticism etc. about how successful or useful something is” [8]. According to the language features of feedback, it can be divided in to two types, explicit feedback and implicit feedback [9]. And the study of implicit feedback has received more attention from researchers than the explicit feedback [9]. Feedback is important in EFL class. Feedback enables the EFL learners to compare the interlanguage and target language, and thus acquire the target language effectively [10].

In Mr. Swift's class, most of the feedbacks given by Mr. Swift are oral, and the explicit type of feedbacks are in great proportion. Explicit feedback refers to “the explicit provision of the correct form, as the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect (for example, ‘Oh, you mean...’, ‘You should say...’)[11].

When students answer a question or make some oral presentation and if the answers are correct or appropriate, Mr. Swift will repeat the expression which the students have mentioned, and then reply it directly with the evaluation words like “Yes”, “Good”, “Right”, “Excellent” and so on. This is one of the typical ways of feedback. When students making appropriate pronunciation, teacher will enhance the language knowledge and expression to the students by saying evaluation words, such as “Yes”, “Good”, “Okay”. On the other hands, when students making some less appropriate answers, Mr. Swift will also use explicit styles of feedback to inform the students that what he or she speak may need some improvement. In this occasion, sentence like “You mean...?” “That means...”. In this way, students may have the idea that what they say are less correct, and they will rethink and reconstruct their answer in another way, or learn the more appropriate answers by receiving the correct feedback given by the teacher.

In example 3, it can be observed that there are three times of feedback, which are all explicit feedbacks. When the student in example 3 answered that “I can write two different points from two sides.”, he did not make his point clearly. In English, it is usually said “angles” instead of “sides”. And Mr. Swift wanted the student to make his point clearer, so he asked “Okay, you mean from different angles, right?” Here he replaced “sides” with “angles”, and make an interrogative sentence “You mean...?” which is a typical type of explicit feedback [11] that have been mentioned in the previous part.

But the student did not response to Mr. Swift' question and felt at a lost to make a proper answer. At this time, the student paused and made the sound of hesitation. The pausing time of the student lasts about three seconds, and then Mr. Swift kept on explaining, accompanying with his body language to help the students understood. Finally, the student got the point and expressed in his way, answering immediately with the expression “put them together”.

In this teaching process, the student first made a less appropriate and less correct answer to the teacher. When the teacher gave the student explicit feedback by asking what did he mean, the student had the idea that he may not express himself correctly. When the teacher gave some hints to him, involving oral explanation and body language, the student in example 4 answer it in a more correct way. Here, it can be observed that how the feedback function of teacher talk influence students' oral output. Explicit feedback can attract students' attention to his/her oral mistakes, and enables them to express themselves in a more proper way.

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T	:	You would talk about what?
S14	:	I can write two different points from two sides.
T	:	Okay you mean from different angles, is that what you mean? To talk about this problem. But anyway, they are all about student special need.
S14	:	Umm...
T	:	They are talk about the same thing. maybe we can...
S14	:	Put them together.
T	:	Yes, we can put them together, right? We can combine the two. Good. Sit down please...

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**Example 3**

In example 4, both explicit and implicit feedback can be observed. Implicit feedback is also known as recast [9]. It refers to “the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error” [11]. When the

student in example 4 said, “boy is very have ideas.” The teacher made implicit feedback without pointing out the problems, but reconstructed the whole expression with “It’s very creative.” The student kept on answering “So they can work together.” Here, the student did not response to what the teacher had said before, instead, he kept on answering what he did not finish talking earlier. The original expression would be “And boy is very, very have ideas. So, they can work together.” It seems that it cannot draw the conclusion that the student has noticed what his expression is incorrect. In English, to describe someone have creativity and cleverness, people can use the adjective “creative”. But the student’s expression is in a Chinese way. And it is hard to tell whether the student have noticed the way he expresses is less like a standard English, for he did not answer or correct his expression afterwards. The implicit feedback has less influence on students’ oral output [9].

T	:	How about you? What’s your opinion? Yes, please Porter.
S19	:	I think mixed school is good.
T	:	Um hum.
S19	:	Because boy and girl are different. They have different advantages. Umm for example, girl is very careful. And boy is very, very have ideas.
T	:	Ok. It’s very creative.
S19	:	So, they can work together.
T	:	To solve some problem, right? Especially in your study, ok, good. That means maybe academically speaking, boys and girls they can motivate each other. They can use their own advantages, right? To help solve the problem together...

**Example 4**

**3.3 Function 3: Supporting Function**

Here the supporting function is an umbrella terms, which refers to the function that teachers use language to support students when they are making oral output, including expanding students’ thinking and helping them make more answers that relating to the fact [6].

The supporting function of teacher talk can be operated in three different ways. First, teachers can use language to supplement information during students making oral output, and thus expand their thinking and assist them express themselves successfully; Second, during the group discussion time, teachers should be the supervision role among the whole class, making sure that students all have equal opportunities to express themselves, and use the advantages of teacher talk to guide and encourage students to discuss, listen, and present; Third, teacher can use language, such as offering the relating expression or key words, to smooth and inspire students who feel anxious or stressful during making oral presentation [12].

In Mr. Swift’s class, Mr. Swift used a lot of teacher talk to support students. One of the most prominent features of the supporting function of teacher talk in Mr. Swift’s class is that he used different tones and markups to support the students who were doing oral presentation. For Example, when student 8 were asked to answer the question “how to put the five paragraphs into the right part of the candy structure”, the student answered “the first part is paragraph one.” The first answer had 6 words which lasted about 3.60 seconds. When he finished his first answered, he made an eye contact with the teacher, pausing for a second, and tried to seek some feedback. Mr. Swift sensed the student had finished his first answered, and made a sound with confirmation like “Um hum” to imply student 8 to keep answering.

The student had received the indication and kept making his second answer “the body part is paragraph two, three and four.” The second answer had 9 words, and the speaking time lasted 3.28 seconds. Finishing the sentence, the student made another eye contact to the teacher who made a supporting manner with the markup “Um hmm” to allow the student kept answering. Then the student made his third answered, with 6 words and lasted 2.85 seconds. The conversation is shown in example 5. From the beginning, it takes 3.60 seconds to finish a 6 words sentence, which means the speech rate was per word 0.600 second. And at second time of oral output, it took 3.28 seconds to make a 9 words sentence, which means per word 0.364 second. And the third answer with 6 words requiring 2.85 seconds, which means per word 0.475 second.

T	:	How about Leo? How would you match the five paragraphs with the candy structure?	/	/	/
S8	:	Umm the first part is paragraph one.	6 words	3.60s	Rate: 0.600 per word
T	:	Um hum.	/	/	/
S8	:	The body part is paragraph two, three and four.	9 words	3.28s	Rate: 0.364 per word
T	:	Um hum.	/	/	/
S8	:	And umm final part is paragraph five.	6 words	2.85s	Rate:0.475 per word
T	:	The whole class, do you all agree? Yes? Good...	/	/	/

**Example 5**

Despite using markups to support students' oral output, Mr. Swift also supported students by giving supplementary information, or soothing students' anxiety during students making oral presentation. For example, when Mr. Swift was telling the students how to make their stance clearly in writing, he mentioned that there were two points overlapping in the writing sample. He first pointed out that there were two points overlap, explaining that "Among the three points, two of them have something in common. They somehow overlap." Mr. Swift used a paraphrasing sentence to make the student understand what did overlap mean, and made them clear about their task—to find out the overlap points, which would enable students to better prepare in the following oral presentation.

After preparation, Mr. Swift invite a student to answer the question "What should we do when there were overlapping points in our writings?" He invited student 14 to answer the question. When student 14 was asked, he stood up and answered slowly and hesitantly, saying "We... umm... I may talk different part from two sides." In his first answer, he slipped of the tongue by saying "we" at the first beginning, and then corrected himself with "I". When student 14 finished his first answer, he paused and looked at the teacher to confirm whether he had answer right and correctly. Mr. Swift gave him feedback by using markups, then student 14 kept answering "such as one...one...paragraph one...I would...I can't..." Here, the expression of student 14 was a fragment and lack of fluency and accuracy. He could not express his idea fully and tried to seek for the teacher's help by looking at the teacher awkwardly.

Sensing this situation, Mr. Swift responded to him by repeating student 14's expression "You would talk about what?" Feeling less embarrassing and anxious, the student 14 replied "I can write two different points from two sides", which were more fluently and more comprehensible from the previous answer. But Mr. Swift needed to figure out what the student wanted to express by "two sides", and he wanted the student to possess a more accurate knowledge about the answer, so Mr. Swift, gently and patiently, kept asking and gave supplementary explanation "Okay you mean from different angles, is that what you mean? To talk about this problem. But anyway, they are all about student special need", by saying so, Mr. Swift added more information to make sure what the student meant and at the same time gave him more advice in expressing ideas, leading the student thinking in another way.

However, student 14 did not get the inspiration and did not know how to respond, he turned into silent again about 3 seconds. Then Mr. Swift offered help with his language to expand student 14' thinking "They are talking about the same thing. Maybe we can..." Hearing this, student 14 reacted immediately, saying "Put them together" with 2 seconds, which were more fluently and accuracy.

T	:	What else can we do, Oscar?	/	/
S14	:	We... umm... I may talk different part from two sides.	5 seconds	Not Fluent, with pauses and mistakes.
T	:	Um hum.	/	/
S14	:	Such as one... one... paragraph one... I would... I can't...	10 seconds	Not Fluent; 5 times of pauses.
T	:	You would talk about what?	/	/
S14	:	I can write two different points from two sides.	5 seconds	No pauses
T	:	Okay you mean from different angles, is that what you mean? To talk about this problem. But anyway, they are all about student special need.	/	/
S14	:	Umm	3 seconds	Pause
T	:	They are talk about the same thing. maybe we can...	/	/
S14	:	Put them together.	2 seconds	More fluent; No Pauses
T	:	Yes, we can put them together, right? We can combine the two. Good....	/	/

**Example 6**

In this part, the research results concerning the influence of teacher talk on students' oral output is analyzed in terms of interrogation function, feedback function and supporting function, which are the top three function in the pedagogical video. Based on the results, findings and conclusions of the influence of teacher talk on students' oral output in EFL class can be drawn and they are to be presented in the final chapter.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Before having the summary and results, the research questions should be reviewed first. The study aims to explore the questions that

- (1) *In class settings, what are the main functions of teacher talks?*
- (2) *In class settings, how students' oral output is influenced by teacher talk?*

And by case study on pedagogical video, conclusion and answers could be drawn for the two research questions.

● *Firstly, based on the occurrence of teacher talk's function, the main functions of teacher talk in the pedagogical video are interrogation function, feedback function and supporting function. Each of which occur 49, 41,*

and 26 times.

● Secondly, with the interrogation function of teacher talk, the chances for students to do oral presentation in EFL class is improved. By interrogation function, teacher can arouse students' interest in teaching content and make students pay attention to the class, helping them focus on the teaching materials before oral presentation. And during students' oral presentation, students can be encouraged to make an oral answer and their thinking will be expanded by the interrogation of teacher. Chinese students are not accustomed to make question to teacher proactively (Xu, 2010: 60)[7], so the interrogation in Mr. Swift's class provides more chances for students to present themselves and practice their oral English, which is beneficial for the students' learning language.

● Thirdly, the feedback function of teacher talk does have some influences on students' oral output, but the effective influences also depends on the types of feedback. Not all kinds of feedback can implement valuable function on students' oral performance. Explicit feedback can attract students' attention to his/her oral mistakes, and enables them to express themselves in a more proper way, thus improve their oral output in terms of accuracy and fluency. However, in the aspect of implicit feedback, there lacks of enough evident that it can enhance students' oral output in the pedagogical video.

● Fourthly, the supporting function of teacher talk have certain influence on fluency and accuracy of students' oral English. Teacher supports the students with language by using markups and adding supplementary information, which can encourage students to express themselves and sooth their negative feelings when making an oral presentation. In the pedagogical video, with the supporting function of teacher's language, it can be observed that the oral expression has improved evidently. The fluency and accuracy of students' oral output has improved.

● Fifthly, under the influence of interrogation, feedback and supporting function of teacher talk, though the students' oral output improves in some degrees in terms of fluency and accuracy, the improvement of complexity cannot be found in this research. This may due to the reason that the questions assigned for the students lacks of complexity and profoundness, and the time for students to re-prepare their answer is not adequate.

## V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research on the pedagogical video has shed certain lights on the EFL teaching. Teacher talk dominates Chinese EFL class. In most of the class time, teacher plays the role that speaks the most and students are usually the listeners in most of the class time. In this sense, teacher talks are significant in improving students' English.

To enable more students to have the chance to express themselves in EFL class, teachers should use more interrogation and questioning in the EFL class. Asking certain students to make an oral presentation is better than simply talking to the whole audiences. And making questions can lead and inspire students to think about the answer, thus better prepare for the talk. There are a lot of researches show that if the students have more chances and time to use the target language, then the students can acquire the target language in a more meaningful way [13].

Besides interrogation, feedback is also necessary. Teacher should give feedback to the students. Giving feedback will help the students have better understanding of their oral performance, correct the mistakes in time, and enhance their language competence. During the presentation time, the support of teacher talks is also necessary.

Teacher should also give necessary support to students, especially those who are too nervous to make a full answer, or those who have less competence to answer the questions. The support of teacher talk includes but not limited to use markups, supplement information, paraphrase the question, etc. Using different kinds of support can encourage students to express themselves more freely and confidently, which means that students will have more positive attitude to do oral presentation, and thus improve their oral output.

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