

Teacher-Pupil Talk in a Bilingual Kindergarten English Class

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Abstract

This study investigated the features of teacher-pupil talk in a bilingual kindergarten English class. One foreign English teacher and five children participated in the study. Basal reading, writing and storybook reading, the three activities that took up most class time, were selected for analysis. One complete period of each of activity was randomly sampled, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the CHILDES system. A coding scheme was developed to examine teacher-pupil talk types in four main categories, "request," "provision," "feedback/response," and "management/discipline." Three major findings were produced: (1) The teacher was dominant, leading the learning activities, while the pupils were passive, following the teacher's instruction. (2) Teacher and pupil talk during basal reading and writing activities consisted predominantly of language skill practices and management utterances. (3) In contrast, during the story-telling activity, the teacher allowed more speaking time and pupils made greater contributions to classroom conversation. The article concludes with implications for early childhood English instruction and suggestions for future studies.

Key words: classroom discourse, bilingual kindergarten, early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

Background

With globalization, the importance of English competence has been widely acknowledged throughout the world in recent years. In Taiwan, zeal for English learning has intensified during this period. With the implementation of the government's policy of teaching English early, beginning within the primary education years, participation in English learning has also been on the rise. According to a survey conducted by Common Wealth (Zhou, 2004), more than 80% of preschoolers and kindergarteners in Taiwan have received or are receiving English education, and 77.8% of the parents surveyed thought English is significant for their children's lives. Results of this survey reveal Taiwanese parents' eager and anxious attitude toward children's English learning as well as the pervasiveness of English instruction in day-care centers and kindergartens.

The pervasiveness of early-childhood English teaching has greatly impacted the field of early childhood education. English has become the main focus of curriculum in many day-care centers and kindergartens. Private "bilingual kindergartens," "all-English," or "international" schools have proliferated in big cities. Many of these private schools operate under the name of short-term language cram schools and illegally recruit preschool students for full-time English courses. They also employ unlicensed foreign teachers to teach children English for half or whole days. Early childhood scholars and practitioners have noted a decline in the quality of the early childhood curriculum, teaching professionalism, and school management, all of

which have been linked with negative impacts on children's balanced development and cultural identity (Chang & Chang, 2001; Hsu, 2001; Lin, 2002; Ruan, 2002). As English has become the dominant course and occupies major learning time, many basic learning activities for children have been crowded out. The primary goal of early-childhood education has often become blurred, and the curriculum has neglected children's developmental needs in the early childhood stage. The teaching of English as a separate subject has also violated the principle of integrative instruction for young children. In a context of increasingly vocal opposition to early-childhood English teaching, the Ministry of Education (2004) announced a prohibition on English instruction as the sole course in kindergartens and nursery schools. The policy forbids whole-day English-only instruction or the teaching of English as an independent subject. However, occasional English instruction integrated into learning activities such as songs, rhymes, stories, and so forth is allowed.

Talk Quality in Adult-Child Interaction

Existing adult-child interaction studies at home or school put much emphasis on the quality of adult-child talk during the interaction process. Studies have focused on discovering adults' various interaction styles and scaffolding strategies used for children's first language development (Chang & Lin, 2006; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Reese, 1995). Previous studies have found that children who are engaged by adults in elaborative conversation and talk on higher cognitive levels have better performance in language and literacy measures. In this research, the cognitive demands of talk were understood in terms of the degree of decontextualization.

Decontextualized talk refers to talk focusing on topics about which there are no cues in the immediate environment; requiring children to go beyond perceptually present information to comprehend or produce utterances (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Reese, 1995; Snow, 1983). Sigel argued that parental decontextualization can be viewed as a form of cognitive distancing (e.g., Sigel, 1982; Sigel, Stinson & Kim, 1993). Sigel's framework provides a way of conceptualizing cognitive-demand levels of parental strategies in conversing with children. According to Sigel, parental distancing strategies vary in the extent to which they encourage children to think beyond the information available in the present environment. Some strategies are characterized as high demand, requiring children's mental processing to extend beyond the given information (e.g., prediction, inference, evaluation). Some are categorized as medium-level demand (e.g., sequencing, reproducing). Others are classified as low demand, requiring children to directly draw information from texts or pictures (e.g., labeling or describing). Empirical studies with first language learners suggested that parental use of high-level distancing strategies positively relates to children's representational abilities (Sigel, 1982) and proved to be the best predictor of children's verbal IQ scores (Pellegrini, Brody, & Sigel, 1985).

The research on adult-child interaction styles and the effect of talk on children's language/literacy development reviewed above provided a framework for investigating the nature and quality of teacher-pupil talk in the kindergarten English class in the study reported here. However, it is crucial to note that in the case of second or foreign language acquisition, the use of decontextualized language

is likely to be especially difficult for young learners owing to their limited second and foreign language skill.

Talk Variation in Different Contexts/Learning Tasks

Some studies have investigated variation in teacher and pupil talk across different learning activities. In terms of ESL (English as a second language) learning, Cathcart (1986) investigated the language differences across six different learning tasks in a Spanish-English bilingual kindergarten class in the US. The tasks were recess, seatwork, free play, playhouse, story-telling, and ESL time (the time for limited English proficiency children to work in a group with the English-speaking teacher). The study found a variety of communicative acts and syntactic structure in situations where the learners had greater control over talk, such as recess. In contrast, in situations where the teacher controlled the talk, such as ESL time, learners tended to give single-word utterances, short phrases, and formulaic chunks.

A review of ESL classroom studies (Long & Porter, 1985) found that students had more opportunities for target language practice and negotiation of meaning in small group learning activities than in teacher-fronted activities (interaction controlled and directed by the teacher). Also in small group activities, both teacher and students asked more questions to clarify what had been said and what was being said. The frequency of correction and responses completed by students was also higher in small group activities.

These studies found variation in teacher-pupil talk across different types of learning activities. The findings suggested that factors influencing pupils' language production included activity

types and the person who controlled conversation. In situations where the teacher took a less dominant role and the pupils were allowed more control of speech, it was more likely for the pupils to have higher levels of participation and to produce more varieties of talk. However, the research relates to ESL students in English-speaking countries, rather than learners of English as a foreign language, which are the focus of this study.

Studies of Early Childhood Classroom Discourse Conducted in Taiwan

Studies of teacher-student talk in native English-speaking children have been abundant (Cathcart, 1986; Cazden, 1988; Cullen, 1998; Dickinson, DeTemple, Hirschler & Smith, 1992; Dickinson & Keebler, 1989; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Long & Sato, 1983; Teale, Martinez & Glass, 1989). However, research on classroom discourse analysis in kindergartens in Taiwan is sparse. Local studies were often carried out qualitatively to investigate teacher-student interaction patterns in specific learning contexts such as sharing time/group discussion (Tsai, 1996, 2001), small group activity (Lin, 2000), book reading activities (Lai, 2001), or activities across different contexts (Luo, 1997). According to Tsai (1996, 2001), a variation in teacher-student classroom interaction patterns was found when the teacher released the right of speech to students and allowed student-initiated talk to occur or when the topic of discussion was more open. During real discussion, students did not simply provide the answer prescribed by the teacher; rather, they co-constructed knowledge with peers and the teacher.

In contrast to their interaction in other subjects and with other teachers, EFL classroom discourse research has found that in English classes, children decreased their interaction and discussion with peers and English teachers (Hsu, 2001). There is evidence too that discussion seldom occurs between teacher and pupil when English is used as the medium of instruction (Wu, 2004). In this research, three types of question were identified in English classes. The most frequently asked questions were those requesting a pupil's display of factual knowledge. The least asked questions were requests for pupils' opinions. Moreover, this type of question was only asked by the Chinese English teacher, not by the native-English-speaking teacher. The functions of teachers' talk in the English classes were mostly to enhance pupils' language skill learning such as vocabulary and sentence pattern drilling. Children's responses tended to be short. Furthermore, disciplinary utterances were predominant in teacher's talk too.

Research Questions

The present study aims to investigate the nature and quality of classroom talk between a foreign English teacher and his pupils in a bilingual kindergarten English class. Variation in the classroom talk under different types of learning tasks was also examined.

Two research questions were posed in this study:

1. What are the teacher and pupils' talk types in the English classes?
2. Is there variation of teacher-pupil talk across different learning activities?

METHOD

Subjects

The kindergarten selected as the site of this research was located in the Da-An district in Taipei City. The focus of observation was on the highest age level class in the school, the Blue Class. This class consisted of five children aged from five to six years old. Their English learning experiences varied, ranging from six months to one and half years. All of the children came from families of middle to high socioeconomic status.

The medium of instruction was Chinese in the morning and English in the afternoon. One Chinese teacher and one American English teacher taught the class. The English teacher, Mr. C., was a 30-year-old male American who was a full-time English teacher in the kindergarten. He had English teaching experience in Taiwan for about two years at different levels ranging from kindergarten through high-school to adult level. He majored in history and anthropology in college and held a bachelor's degree in art.

Data Collection

During the study period of three months, the Blue Class was visited once or twice a week to observe practices of English language instruction. It was observed that three major learning activities took the largest portion of learning time, namely, basal reading (27%), picture book reading (19%), and writing (18%). These activities constituted 64% of the learning time. One complete class period (25 to 30 minutes) of each of the three learning activities was randomly

selected and tape-recorded for detailed analysis.

Data Analysis

Recorded teacher-pupil talk in the three classes was transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the CHILDES system (MacWhinney, 2000). A coding system used in previous studies (Chang, 2003; Dickinson, et al., 1992; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993; Wang, 2001) was adapted to investigate the nature of utterances produced by the teacher and the pupils during the three learning activities. The basic unit of coding was the utterance.

The coding scheme included four main categories: “request,” “provision,” “feedback/response,” and “management/discipline.” In what follows, definitions of the codes are presented and illustrated with examples drawn from the language data collected for this study.

Request or provision. Request or provision refers to requests that the teacher/pupils make or responses/spontaneous comments provided by the teacher or pupils.

- (1) Request for or provision of attention: utterances drawing or showing interlocutor’s attention, e.g., Teacher: Are you guys ready? Child: Yes!
- (2) Request for or provision of clarification: utterances requesting clarification of what the interlocutor just said or utterances responding to request of clarification, e.g., Teacher: Take off whose clothes? Child: She’s clothes.
- (3) Request for or provision of evaluation: utterances eliciting interlocutor’s perspective on the event under discussion or utterances responding to request for evaluation, e.g., Teacher: Was that very nice of the huntsman? Child: No.

- (4) Request for or participation in linguistic practice: teacher's request for students' participation in linguistic practices or students' participation in linguistic pattern drills, e.g.,
Teacher: Kelly Koala. Say Kelly Koala. Child: Kelly Koala.
- (5) Request for or provision of information: two subcategories were further identified, namely, immediate talk and non-immediate talk.

Immediate talk. Immediate talk refers to talk requesting or providing comments focusing on a here and now topic, including the following:

- (1) Labeling or naming: utterances regarding labeling or naming of an object for a picture in the book, including character identification, e.g.,
Teacher: What is it? Child: Fruit!
- (2) Book focus: utterances regarding information about a book, including reference to the cover, the title, author, page turning and physical features of the book, e.g.,
Teacher: What is the name of the story? Teacher: It is *The Six Swans*.
- (3) Display knowledge: utterances regarding a display of factual knowledge immediately available from the text or illustration, usually with only one acceptable answer, e.g.,
Teacher: What color sweaters are the foxes wearing? Child: Purple and blue.

Non-immediate talk. Non-immediate talk refers to the type of talk that goes beyond the here and now topic, including the following:

- (1) Inference: utterances requesting or providing explanations

- and inferences, including “why” questions, e.g., Child: She is sad?
Teacher: Yes, well, she is sad because she is looking for her brothers.
- (2) Prediction: utterances requesting or providing predictions about what is going to happen, e.g., Teacher: He does not want their stepmother to know about them. Maybe she is going to eat them.
 - (3) Text-child link: utterances requesting or providing information making connections between the text and the real world of the children, such as general knowledge talk, personal experience, feelings, or opinions, e.g., Teacher: Would you like to sleep in the tree? Child: Yes.
 - (4) Text-text link: utterances requesting or providing connections between the book being read and other books/texts, e.g., Teacher: Do you remember in *Snow White* how the witch can change herself?
 - (5) Vocabulary related: utterances about the spelling, pronunciation or meaning of a word, e.g., Teacher: What does “probably” mean? Child: Maybe.
 - (6) Reading aloud: teacher’s or pupils’ reading aloud of a text, e.g., Teacher: “One day when the king is hunting.”

Feedback/Response. Feedback/Response refers to positive, negative or neutral reaction to the interlocutor’s performance, response or comment, e.g., Teacher: Hey, that’s good, guys.

Management/Discipline. Management/Discipline refers to utterances dealing with management of classroom order or control of pupils’ behavior, e.g., Teacher: Raise your hand and I will call you.

Other. Utterances not belonging to the above four main categories were classified as “Other.”

Reliability of Coding

Two coders independently coded 25% of each of the three classroom transcripts for reliability. Cohen's kappa statistic was adopted for estimating inter-rater corrected-for-chance agreement. Coding agreement achieved to 96% for the basal reading transcript, 97% for the picture book reading transcript, and 100% for the writing activity transcript.

RESULTS

Basic Length Measures of Teacher and Pupils Talk

To measure the quantity of teacher and pupil talk in the classroom, the number of utterances, the number of words, and mean length of utterance (MLU) in teacher and pupil talk were computed using the *FREQ* and *MLU* programs (see Table 1).

Textual and extra-textual utterances were first divided in order to distinguish between direct recitation of texts and self-language productions in the English class. Textual utterances referred to recitation of basal or story texts; extra-textual utterances were the comments produced by the teacher or pupils. As displayed in Table 1, the number of teacher extra-textual utterances and words exceeded those produced by the pupils. As for MLU, the teacher's extra-textual comments were likewise longer than those of the pupils. These findings indicate that the teacher produced more extra textual comments and longer utterances than the pupils.

Table 1
The Analysis of Utterances in Pupil and Teacher Talk

	Writing		Basal reading		Story-telling	
	Teacher	Pupil	Teacher	Pupil	Teacher	Pupil
Number of utterances	238	69	147	231	494	118
Textual	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (1%)	165 (44%)	216 (35%)	0 (0%)
Extra-textual	238 (77%)	69 (23%)	143 (38%)	66 (17%)	278 (46%)	118 (19%)
Number of words	1429	153	897	1276	3638	359
Textual	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (1%)	1033 (48%)	1964 (49%)	0 (0%)
Extra-textual	1429 (90%)	153 (10%)	878 (40%)	243 (11%)	1674 (42%)	359 (9%)
Mean length of utterance (MLU)						
Extra-textual	6	2.22	6.14	3.68	6.02	3.04

Variation was observed in teacher and pupil talk across the three learning activities. During the basal reading activity, the teacher produced the fewest utterances and words while the pupils' textual utterances and words constituted quite a large proportion of the total classroom utterances. In contrast, the teacher's utterances and words were predominant during writing and story-telling activities. Of the three activities, it was the story-telling activity which generated the greatest number of utterances and words for extra-textual comments on the part of the students. The pupils' extra-textual comments were few in both the writing and basal reading activities.

Frequency and Distribution of Teacher-Pupil Talk Types

Results of the teacher and pupil talk types across the three learning activities are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Frequency and Distribution of Teacher and Pupils Talk

Variables	Writing		Basal Reading		Story Telling	
	Teacher	Pupil	Teacher	Pupil	Teacher	Pupil
	freq (%)	freq (%)	freq (%)	freq (%)	freq (%)	freq (%)
Request	44 (19.73)	6 (6.90)	8 (5.59)	8 (3.2)	38 (7.94)	34 (26.99)
Request for attention	1 (0.45)	1 (1.15)	2 (1.40)	0 (0)	3 (0.63)	7 (5.56)
Request for clarification	3 (1.35)	1 (1.15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (1.88)	1 (0.79)
Request for evaluation	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0.63)	2 (1.59)
Request for linguistic practice	22 (9.87)	0 (0)	3 (2.10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Request for information: immediate	15 (6.73)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (1.46)	8 (6.35)
Labeling or naming	1 (0.45)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (4.76)
Display knowledge	14 (6.28)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (1.46)	2 (1.59)
Request for information: non-immediate	3 (1.35)	4 (4.6)	3 (2.10)	8 (3.2)	16 (3.34)	16 (12.7)
Inference	0 (0)	1 (1.15)	0 (0)	7 (3)	7 (1.46)	16 (12.7)
Text-child link	3 (1.35)	0 (0)	1 (0.70)	1 (0.43)	4 (0.83)	0 (0)
Text-text link	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.42)	0 (0)
Vocabulary-related	0 (0)	3 (3.45)	2 (1.40)	0 (0)	3 (0.63)	0 (0)

Table 2 (continued)

<u>Provision</u>	15 (6.28)	20 (22.99)	22 (15.8)	187 (78)	355 (73.97)	47 (37.28)
Provision of attention	2 (0.90)	0 (0)	1 (0.70)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.79)
Provision of clarification	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.42)	2 (1.59)
Provision of evaluation	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (1.25)	6 (4.76)
Participation in linguistic practice	0 (0)	9 (10.34)	2 (1.40)	165 (69)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Provision of information: immediate	4 (1.79)	8 (9.2)	3 (2.1)	3 (1)	66 (13.75)	16 (12.69)
Labeling or naming	1 (0.45)	3 (3.45)	2 (1.4)	1 (0)	5 (1.04)	5 (3.96)
Book focus	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.7)	0 (0)	4 (0.83)	0 (0)
Display knowledge	3 (1.35)	5 (5.75)	0 (0)	2 (1)	57 (11.88)	11 (8.73)
Request for information: non-immediate	9 (3.59)	3 (3.45)	16 (11.19)	18 (8)	67 (13.96)	22 (17.45)
Inference	1 (0.49)	0 (0)	8 (6)	0 (0)	31 (6.46)	8 (6.35)
Prediction	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0.63)	0 (0)
Text-child link	2 (0.9)	3 (3.45)	5 (3.5)	16 (7)	26 (5.42)	6 (4.76)
Text-text link	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (1.58)
Vocabulary-related	6 (2.69)	0 (0)	3 (2.1)	2 (1)	7 (1.46)	0 (0)
Read aloud	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	214 (44.58)	0 (0)
<u>Feedback/Response</u>	47 (21.08)	17 (19.54)	13 (9.20)	6 (3)	21 (4.38)	24 (19.04)
<u>Management/Discipline</u>	72 (32.29)	11 (12.64)	85 (59.44)	11 (4)	44 (9.17)	0 (0)
<u>Other</u>	46 (20.63)	33 (37.93)	15 (10.49)	26 (11)	22 (4.58)	21 (16.67)

As shown in Table 2, in basal reading and writing activities, the teacher primarily produced utterances in the management/discipline category; and the pupils, in the category of linguistic practices. During the writing activity, the proportion of pupil talk appeared to be the highest in the “other” category because pupils produced a certain amount of irrelevant talk (20.69%). This irrelevant talk was not directly related to the learning task or the topic under discussion in the classroom. One example was a child’s utterance asking for permission to go to the bathroom (i.e. “May I go to the bathroom?”). Pupils’ talk was also high in the “provision” category (22.99%) in the writing activity.

During the story-telling activity, the teacher produced a large number of textual utterances while reading the story aloud (44.58%). The pupils’ talk was mainly distributed across the “request” (26.99%) and “provision” (37.28%) categories. The occurrence of request during this activity was higher than that found during the writing and basal reading contexts. In what follows, results regarding subcategories of “request” and “provision” across the three learning tasks are presented in detail.

Request. The teacher’s request types varied across the three learning tasks. During the writing activity, the teacher mostly requested linguistic practice (22 times) and linguistic knowledge display (“request for display knowledge,” 14 times, e.g., “Is it a good j?” “What name is that?” “What word is that?”). These request types focused on reinforcement of pupils’ linguistic skills. In contrast, during the basal reading activity, there were few teacher requests. During the story-telling activity, the teacher mostly requested that the

pupil provide information. He asked the pupils to provide the information about the storyline (“request for display knowledge” 7 times, e.g., Teacher: How does every story start?) as well as a variety of non-immediate talk, such as:

- (1) “inference” (7 times, e.g., Teacher: How come she can throw a shirt onto a boy and turn it into a swan?)
- (2) “text-child link” (4 times, e.g., Teacher: If your brother turned into a bird and flew out the window, would you be sad?)
- (3) “text-text link” (2 times, e.g., Teacher: Do you remember in snow white how the witch can change herself?)
- (4) “vocabulary-related” (3 times, e.g., Teacher: How would you spell starflower?)
- (5) “evaluation” (3 times, e.g., Teacher: Was that very nice of the huntsman?)

These request types were open-ended with possibilities for eliciting personal experiences, general world knowledge, value judgments, or inference-making from the students. In this activity, Mr. C. also made the highest number of requests for clarification in response to pupils’ questions (9 times, e.g., Teacher: Daniel, what is your question?). This implies that the teacher might attempt to negotiate meaning with pupils.

In EFL/ESL classroom discourse studies, the distinction between use of display questions and referential questions has often been discussed (e.g., Long & Sato, 1983; Tsui, 1985; Wang, 2001; Zhang, 1990). Display questions were those questions for which the questioner already has an answer in mind. In contrast, referential questions (genuine questions) were those questions for which the

questioner does not already have an answer. In the present study, the teacher asked more display questions during the writing activity but asked more genuine questions during the story-telling session.

As for pupils' requests, there were fewer of these during the writing and basal reading activities and most during the story-telling activity. The high frequency of student request for attention (7 times, e.g., Student: teacher Jack...) during the story-telling activity indicated their high communicative intent to get the teachers' attention or permission to either ask questions or to provide information. During the story-telling activity, the pupils also asked many referential questions about story plot and character motivation (request for inference, 16 times, e.g., Student: Why he he his face have a xxx?) and request for value judgments (request for evaluation, 2 times, e.g., Student: Teacher, stepmother is good or bad?").

Provision. During the writing activity, the high frequency of teacher requests (44 times) was associated with a high frequency of pupil provision (20 times). It was found that the frequency of pupils' utterances of provision was high. These utterances included linguistic practices (9 times), immediate talk, such as display knowledge (5 times, e.g., Teacher: What color sweaters are the foxes wearing? Students: Purple and blue.), and labeling/naming (3 times, e.g., Teacher: Your mouth go to your...Students: Stomach.). These types of talk are low in cognitive demand.

During the basal reading activity, the pupils produced a greater amount of provision talk than the teacher. Most of the pupils' utterances were linguistic practice, such as drills or reciting the basal texts (165 times, e.g., Students: Here is an apple tree. Apples are good

for you, says Peter. Have an apple, Jane. An apple for you and an apple for me.). During reading of the basal texts, the teacher and pupils provided non-immediate information, but the occurrences of non-immediate talk were lower than those during the story-telling activity.

In the case of the story-telling activity, about 45% of the teacher's utterances were reading aloud (214 times). A greater variety of provision talk produced by both the teacher and pupils occurred during this activity. With the exception of the focus, prediction, and vocabulary-related categories, all types of immediate talk and non-immediate talk in pupils' utterances were observed. Among the three talk types of immediate talk, "display knowledge" (e.g., Teacher: How does every story start? Students: Once upon a time.) occurred most frequently, which suggests that the teacher and pupils had a lot of discussion about the storyline. As for non-immediate talk, all five categories of this type of talk occurred during the story-telling activity. These were

- (1) "inference" (e.g., Student: Why here have fish? Teacher: The dress is made up of water. Fish is in the water right? It's a magical water dress.)
- (2) "prediction" (e.g., Teacher: Now what? Student: Teacher, she want tell princesses she is witch.)
- (3) "text-child link" (e.g., Teacher: Do you like to sleep in the tree? Students: No.)
- (4) "text-text link" (e.g., Teacher: Do you remember in Snow White how the witch can change herself? Students: Yeah. Teacher: Same thing.)
- (5) "vocabulary-related" (e.g., Teacher: Over joy means really happy.)

Evaluative comments were also provided. These findings suggest that during story-telling activity, the teacher and pupils were engaged in talk with higher cognitive demand.

Illustrative Excerpts

Excerpts of the class transcript are presented below to demonstrate verbal interaction between the teacher and pupils during the three learning activities.

Writing. The following excerpt illustrates a typical dialogue between the teacher and students in writing session:

Excerpt 1

- | | | | |
|-------------|--|-------------|--|
| 1 Teacher: | What word is this? | 16 Teacher: | Gloria, come here. |
| 2 Casey: | xxx. | 17 Teacher: | What is this? |
| 3 Teacher: | Frank? | 18 Gloria: | Duck. |
| 4 Casey: | Wolf. | 19 Teacher: | Duck, David the duck. |
| 5 Teacher: | Is that a wolf? | 20 Gloria: | David the duck. |
| 6 Casey: | No, fox. | 21 Teacher: | Duck, David the duck. |
| 7 Teacher: | Then what word is that? | 22 Gloria: | David the duck. |
| 8 Casey: | Fox. | 23 Teacher: | So we do upper case d, lower case d. |
| 9 Teacher: | Fox, Frank the fox. | 24 Gloria: | Lower case d. |
| 10 Teacher: | What color sweaters are the foxes wearing? | 25 Teacher: | Show me how to draw upper case d and lower case d. |
| 11 Casey: | Purple and blue. | 26 Teacher: | Very good, Gloria. |
| 12 Teacher: | Purple and blue sweater. | 27 Teacher: | Do another one, please. |
| 13 Teacher: | Is the friend of Frank a boy or girl fox? | | |
| 14 Casey: | Boy. | | |
| 15 Teacher: | No, no look at this. It's a girl fox. | | |

In the above excerpt, the teacher played a dominant role eliciting responses from the pupils and giving the pupils writing instruction. The pupils responded passively to the teacher's questions and followed the teacher's instruction. As was shown in Table 2, during the writing activity, the teacher and students made many utterances entailing requests and provision about linguistic practices respectively. As shown in Excerpt 1, the primary type of information elicited from pupils was linguistic practices and display of factual knowledge (e.g., line 1 "What word is this?" line 5 "Is that a wolf?" line 10 "What color sweaters are the foxes wearing?"). The two types of questions used most frequently by the teacher were "what questions" and "yes-no questions." These questions elicit short, restricted answers from the pupils and require lower cognitive demand. The pupils had very limited one word or short phrase responses. During the writing activity, opportunity for topic extension or elaboration in the teacher-pupil dialogues was rare.

Basal reading. During basal reading, utterances regarding recitation of the basal texts were predominant. The following excerpt illustrates the routine interaction in basal reading session:

Excerpt 2

1 Teacher:	Are you guys ready?	13 Children:	Little donkey is probably hungry, too.
2 Children:	It was winter.	14 Children:	I'll take this turnip to him.
3 Children:	It was very hard.	15 Teacher:	Okay, stop, stop.
4 Teacher:	Snowing very hard.	16 Teacher:	Jack, read me the whole page.
5 Children:	Snowing very hard.	17 Teacher:	You are looking at this page, right?
6 Children:	It was very cold.	18 Teacher:	There is not a single word on this page.
7 Children:	The animals were out looking for food.	19 Teacher:	So you know all of this by memory, right?
8 Children:	Little rabbit found two turnips.	20 Teacher:	You know all of this by memory?
9 Children:	He gobbled one right up.	21 Teacher:	Read me this please, Jack.
10 Children:	He wanted another turnip.		
11 Children:	He wanted the other turnip.		
12 Children:	Then he thought about his friend little donkey.		

As exhibited in the above excerpt, the pupils were very familiar with the routine of text reading. Right after the teacher asked the students, “are you guys ready,” (line 1), the students started choral reading (line 2 to 14) and did not stop until line 15 when the teacher noticed a student Jack who did not pay attention to the words read. The teacher asked Jack to read the text by himself to check if he could really read the words out (line 16-21). Jack had mastered the reading task and he could read the text aloud and correctly. The excerpt clearly shows that the teacher played a dominant role in basal reading class, requesting the pupils’ participation in the reading aloud task. The talk between the teacher and pupils in the class was restricted to recitation of the text.

Story-telling. The following excerpt demonstrates teacher-pupil verbal interaction during the story-telling activity:

Excerpt 3

1 Gloria:	Teacher Gavin is that bad witch or good witch?	8 Teacher:	Yes, Jack.
2 Teacher:	Bad witch! bad witch bad witch.	9 Jack:	Why he he his face have a xx?
3 Jack:	Bad witch.	10 Teacher:	Her face?
4 Teacher:	Yes, Ariel.	11 Teacher:	Well a witch can look any way they want right?
5 Ariel:	Why why why why that witch witch why why why is why that witch like wolf?	12 Teacher:	Do you remember in Snow White how the witch can change herself?
6 Teacher:	Well she is that half wolf half witch.	13 Child:	Yeah.
7 Lucy:	Like 貓(mao) [cat].	14 Teacher:	Same thing!
		15 Jack:	And so she do.

As mentioned earlier, a variety of talk types occurred during teacher-pupil conversation and more questions from the students were allowed during story-telling activity. As shown in the above excerpt, the pupils posed a number of questions, such as evaluative question asked by Gloria (line 1), and inferential questions asked by Ariel and Jack (lines 5 and 9). Mr. C. not only provided answers to the pupils' questions, but also responded to the pupil's questions with an interrogative (line 11) and with the strategy of cross-textual link (line 12). The concept of the witch in the story *Snow White* was introduced into the conversation to help the pupils to understand "why a witch can look any way she wants" (line 11).

These types of talk were cognitively demanding in nature. Pupils appeared to actively participate in the conversation. However, it is worth noting that there was little topic elaboration in the conversation. The pupils' language production was limited in length and their ideas were not expressed in complete, correct sentences.

Following is another excerpt of the teacher and pupils'

conversation. The conversation concerns a character and requires students to use the clues in an illustration. In this excerpt, the teacher asked successive questions, and continuity was maintained with follow-up questions.

Excerpt 4

- | | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------|--|
| 1 Teacher: | Ok. Lucy, what's your question? | 13 Jack: | Teacher C. |
| 2 Lucy: | What's that? | 14 Teacher: | shi, hold on hold on. |
| 3 Teacher: | What's that? | 15 Teacher: | uh if you keep calling my name I am going to ignore you. |
| 4 Teacher: | You know what's that? | 16 Teacher: | Raise your hand and I will call you. |
| 5 Casey: | uh, he a fox! | 17 Teacher: | See this woman here, you don't see the tail, do you? |
| 6 Jack: | Wolf! | 18 Teacher: | You don't see the tail. |
| 7 Teacher: | I think maybe she is a wolf! | 19 Teacher: | You don't see the tail? |
| 8 Casey: | Fox! | 20 Teacher: | Then you look here. |
| 9 Teacher: | It looks like a wolf in fox's tail, doesn't it? | 21 Teacher: | She is got a fox's tail. |
| 10 Jack: | Teacher what what the... | 22 Teacher: | I think she is a witch. |
| 11 Jack: | Teacher C, what what she she is who? | | |
| 12 Teacher: | That is the queen, remember? | | |

This conversation was initiated by Lucy's question. Noticing something abnormal in the illustration—a tail on a queen, Lucy pointed to the illustration and asked the teacher “what's that?” (line 2). Instead of answering Lucy's question directly, the teacher requested answers from all the pupils (lines 3, 4). Guesses were provided by Casey and Jack (lines 5, 6). Then the teacher immediately provided the complete linguistic form as feedback, making the inference, “I think maybe she is a wolf!” (line 5). In lines 10 and 11, another student, Jack, asked a question about character identification and the

teacher provided an answer (line 12). Jack's request for attention (line 13) was denied by the teacher through management talk (lines 14, 15, 16). The teacher led the pupils to compare the illustrations of the character on a previous page and the present page (lines 17 to 22). The teacher provided the inference for the conclusion "I think she is a witch" (line 22).

During this process, the teacher and pupils were engaged in making inferences about the character's identity. This conversation was initiated by a pupil, but the pupils' language productions were very limited in form and their ideas may not have been expressed completely. The teacher continued the discussion with follow up questions and feedback. However, the inference utterances were primarily provided by the teacher rather than by the pupils.

DISCUSSION

Results of this study suggest that the teacher played a dominant role in English classroom interaction. He talked much more than the pupils and the frequency of his provision of extra-textual comments was twice as high as the pupils'. Moreover, the teacher had control of topics of conversation. He took the initiative role and made more requests than the pupils did. There was little pupil-initiated talk. Also there were few opportunities for topic continuation unless the teacher picked up the pupils' utterances and expanded them.

In local studies of first language learning in early childhood classrooms, a teacher-directed pattern was also evident. The teachers tended to have a powerful, dominant role when engaged in

conversation with pupils (Lai, 2001; Tsai, 2001). However, unlike the present study, research has shown that when the topic of discussion becomes more open and the teacher grants more speaking rights to pupils, variation of the teacher-pupil interaction pattern occurred (Tsai, 2001). In contrast with the interaction in the English class, pupils in the first language learning context are provided with more possibilities to have active classroom participation with the teacher and peers.

With respect to differences across learning activities, this study found distinctive features in formal and informal activities. During talk in formal language instruction, i.e., basal reading and writing, the teacher and pupil talk consisted predominantly of management or disciplinary utterances and linguistic practice. The low level and limited amount of pupil talk was found in the present study and previous ESL/EFL classroom research (Cullen, 1998; Wang, 2001; Wu, 2004).

As noted above, a greater variety of talk was produced by teacher and pupils during the storybook reading activity. Besides the immediate talk regarding the storyline, many instances of “non-immediate talk” or “more cognitively challenging talk” also occurred during the story-telling activity. In the present study, pupils were engaged in prediction of upcoming events in the story and provision of evaluative responses. They also made inferences that required them to link their personal experiences to the story. Furthermore, there was talk that included cross-textual connections between the book being read and other texts. Pupils were challenged in those conversations to go beyond perceptually presented

information to comprehend or to produce utterances. Talk like this which involves the use of “decontextualized language” or “high-level distancing strategies” (Sigel et al., 1993) has been reported as beneficial for children’s language and cognitive development in early childhood adult-child interaction studies (De Temple, 2001; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Reese, 1995; Sigel, 1982). In the activity analyzed in this study, this extended talk was initiated by referential questions (why, how, and when questions) either by the teacher or pupils.

Although the pupils had a higher level of participation in the storybook reading activity than that in the other activities, it is noticeable that the pupils’ utterances were still limited in number. The pupils’ limitation in foreign language use meant that they were unable to express themselves completely. It was difficult for them to produce long, clear utterances in English. Their English was more fragmented than their first language. Moreover, although more rights of speech were given to the pupils, the teacher held the role as topic controller during the book reading activity. Since the pupils had very limited English speaking ability, the teacher did most of the talking for the pupils.

CONCLUSION

According to the regulations announced by Ministry of Education (2004), English should not be taught as an independent subject in kindergartens. However, the English class observed in the present study, particularly in writing and basal reading activities, was

found to be dominated by discrete language skill instruction. The over-emphasis on language skills learning caused pupils to spend a lot of time and energy mechanically drilling on language skills. This is indicative of a low level of cognitive demand. These findings correspond to the problems pointed out by the prior research (Hsu, 2001; Wu, 2004). Due to limited English ability of the pupils, English instruction in early childhood programs might reduce the depth and quality of teacher-pupil discussion in the classroom.

In this study, higher quality teacher-pupil interaction occurred during the story-telling session. This suggests that integration of English instruction into a story-telling activity might be suitable for young EFL learners. Scholars have emphasized the importance of social interaction for children's second language acquisition (Tabors, 1997; Wong-Fillmore, 1983). One of the strengths in story-telling or picture book reading activity is that the books provide a language rich context for adult-child interaction. The story itself could stimulate more talk from pupils. However, since pupils are very limited in second/foreign language use, the teachers' elicitation and feedback strategies play a significant role in facilitating pupils' participation. If teachers could ask more open-ended referential questions, eliciting information from pupils and providing content-based feedback to pupils' utterances, conversation in the classroom might be more sustained and elaborative.

The present study entailed a fine-grained analysis of teacher-pupil talk in a bilingual kindergarten English class. Results of this study are helpful for understanding actual English instruction practices in early childhood programs. Due to the researchers'

limitations on time, only three sessions of the major learning activity types in the kindergarten were sampled. For further study, more classes might be included for analysis. All-English and various Chinese and English bilingual preschool programs exist in Taiwan. Research on teacher-pupil talk in English classes offered by all-English or different bilingual programs might also be conducted to better understand verbal input young children receive in these classes.

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雙語幼稚園英語課堂師生言談研究

摘要

本文分析雙語幼稚園英語課堂中師生言談的內容及互動之特徵。研究對象為一外籍教師及五位幼兒。研究者選取在該園幼兒學習時間最長的三種活動，即讀本閱讀、寫作和說故事，並隨機擷取每種活動完整之一堂課錄音。錄音語料採用兒童語料交換系統格式進行轉寫、編碼和分析。師生言談編碼分析主要包含四大類目：請求、提供、回饋/回應和教室管理。本研究重要發現為：(1) 教師主導課室學習活動，學生扮演被動之角色，接受教導；(2) 在讀本閱讀和寫作活動，師生言談主要偏重語文技巧的學習和教室管理；(3) 在說故事活動中師生言談互動有較大之變異，老師釋放較多發言機會給幼兒，也引發幼兒較多之談話和較高程度之參與。本文依據研究結果提出幼兒英語教育和未來研究之建議。

關鍵詞：師生言談 雙語幼稚園 幼兒教育