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## Pre-service ESL teachers' instructional discourse during one-on-one tutoring

*Vicky Giouroukakis, Andrea Honigsfeld, Jacqueline Endres-Nenchin and Lisa Peluso*

### Introduction

Teacher discourse or teacher talk is the form of discourse that teachers use when instructing their students. Chaudron (1983) described teacher talk as a particular form of speech used by teachers to instruct their students through language that is clear and explicit. He compared teachers' speech and native speakers' speech to nonnative speakers in settings outside the classroom (also called foreigner talk), explaining that differences exist but are not sufficiently systematic or distinct to make teacher talk a 'special sociolinguistic domain' (Chaudron 1988: 55): 'It appears that the adjustments in teacher speech to nonnative-speaking learners serve the temporary purpose of maintaining communication – clarifying information and eliciting learners' responses – and do not identify the interaction as an entirely different social situation' (Chaudron 1988: 55). Osborne (1999) noted that teachers' speech when directed towards students is 'shorter, simpler, and more carefully pronounced than typical speech' (Osborne 1999: 12).

Although pre-service ESL teachers are exposed to the linguistic, cognitive, affective, cultural, social, and instructional factors contributing to variations in language acquisition among English language learners through their coursework, emerging teachers also need first-hand experience with researching, critiquing, and, above all, practising effective instructional techniques and strategies. Good teacher education programmes include many opportunities for the practical application of theoretical knowledge. At Molloy College, the service-learning experience in the form of an extensive tutoring project offers such an opportunity.

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the characteristics of pre-service ESL teachers' instructional discourse during their one-on-one tutoring of English Language Learners (ELLs). In reviewing the data, we wanted not only to look at the professional growth of the pre-service teachers and the language development of their ESL students but also to evaluate the teachers' use of language in the exchange. Through the study of their discourse, we hoped to discover if the pre-service teachers were

employing appropriate modifications for ESL students on the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and discourse levels, using Craig Chaudron's (1988) typology of teacher talk. We also wanted to explore how the tutoring project, which required pre-service teachers to keep a journal and reflect upon their tutoring experiences, helped the participants monitor their language input in order to make content more comprehensible for their ELLs.

Specifically, this study attempted to answer three research questions: (a) Do teachers intuitively make modifications to their language input during their one-on-one tutoring of ELLs? (b) If teachers do make modifications, are they appropriate modifications on the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and discourse levels in Chaudron's framework of teacher talk? (c) Does the tutoring project help pre-service teachers monitor their language input in order to make content more comprehensible for their ELLs?

### Methodology

#### **The research context: ELL tutoring**

The ELL tutoring project was an integral part of a core TESOL course required by all TESOL majors to be completed in the initial phase of their teacher preparation programme. The course, 'Second Language Acquisition and TESOL' serves as an introduction to English as a second language teaching and learning. It provides the course participants with (a) a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundation of second language acquisition (SLA) and TESOL and (b) practical methodologies, approaches, and techniques necessary for the effective instruction of ELLs.

Course participants explore historical perspectives of second language learning research and the development of various language teaching approaches. They examine the similarities and differences between first and second language acquisition as well as several approaches and perspectives of second language teaching. The linguistic, cognitive, affective, cultural, social, and instructional factors contributing to variations in language acquisition among ELLs are also considered. Course participants practise effective

instructional techniques and strategies and classroom management techniques, and review and critically analyse instructional resources.

### **The tutoring project**

The tutoring project required pre-service teachers to tutor an ELL for eight full hours during the semester and tape record the sessions. The option was given to course participants to use long-hand if the tutoring circumstances did not permit audio taping. Two used this option and submitted their handwritten record. The pre-service teachers kept a journal reflecting on the tutoring process, activities, students' responses, and progress. The reflective journal was submitted in two parts, at mid-semester and at the end of the semester.

The purpose of the tutoring project was threefold: (a) to offer an initial field experience to pre-service ESL teachers as they enter the teaching profession, (b) to allow course participants to make meaningful connections between theory and practice, and (c) to contribute to the community of ELLs by integrating teacher preparation course work with community service.

The class sessions consisted of instruction on second language acquisition theory and practice and TESOL, discussions on the course content, group discussion sessions on the tutoring experience, instructor feedback and ongoing support of the tutoring project, and student presentations of language-teaching models. In addition to the tutoring project, the course assignments include (a) a philosophy paper, (b) a language teaching model presentation, and (c) a critique of an ESL teacher's instruction.

### **The tutors**

The first author was awarded an institutional grant to analyse her course participants' teacher discourse as revealed by a required tutoring project. The tutors were 15 pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the Master's in TESOL Education programme and sought New York State TESOL Certification. They were at different points of the teacher education programme, but all had taken at least one other TESOL course before. They were asked to find their tutees in their particular school or social contexts. Service sites were on Long Island, New York. However, they were also provided with the contact information for schools and educational centres in the community where they could volunteer, if necessary. The goal of the tutoring was to (a) develop students' English language skills and/or (b) provide students with support in classroom and homework assignments, and reinforce and

extend content knowledge in the areas of English, mathematics, social studies, and science.

### **The tutees**

The tutees were English Language Learners who ranged in age and educational level. The youngest students were elementary-aged who had been in the U.S. for at least one year. The oldest student was a 74-year-old retiree from Argentina who had a functional knowledge of English but had never received formal English language instruction. Most tutees were school-aged recent arrivals to the United States who received the tutoring interventions as an after-school activity.

### **Data sources and data analysis procedures**

We utilized a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Data sources included participants' audio-taped and transcribed tutoring sessions, tutoring journals, course assignments, instructors' field notes, and individual and focus group interviews.

To ensure research validity and reliability, two researchers and two research assistants were involved in reviewing and/or coding all qualitative data. Each tape-recorded tutoring session was analysed independently for probable congruence and incongruence with Chaudron's (1988) typology of teacher talk. We systematically identified and matched each tutors' verbalizations to categories and subcategories established by Chaudron. The qualitative data analysis methodologies used included both topic coding and analytic coding, first to recognize all types of occurrences of teacher discourse and next to question the data and the emerging categories. We also examined the data for any additional emergent categories of teacher discourse to be able to expand upon Chaudron's framework. A narrative analysis matrix was created to reveal congruent and incongruent patterns of teacher discourse as compared to Chaudron's framework. The coding process allowed for the emergence of Chaudron's categories and subcategories as well as new ones unique to this study.

### **Results**

Two strands of findings emerged from the tape-recorded tutoring sessions. First, pre-service teachers' instructional discourse was congruent with Chaudron's (1988) framework of teacher talk, and second, pre-service teachers intuitively utilized additional modifications to their language input. The areas of phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse were each analysed separately. Detailed findings related to discourse are presented in the

appendix, whereas representative examples of the findings for other linguistic areas are presented below. Quotes from tutors are given in parentheses.

### **Instructional discourse to validate Chaudron's framework**

#### **1. Phonological modifications**

Tutors made phonological modifications that included (a) exaggerated articulation, (b) pauses, (c) slower rate of speech, (d) less reduction of vowels and consonant clusters, and (e) louder delivery.

Approximately 80% of tutors utilised exaggerated articulation to help tutees pronounce familiar but especially new words. Many told their tutees where the tongue is placed when pronouncing certain words, but particularly words with the *th* cluster. 30% of tutors utilised extended pauses when communicating directions on how to complete a task. They also paused to allow tutees time to write down information/responses ('food [pause] processor', 'around [pause] the corner [pause] from'). Tutors gave tutees time to carry out tasks and formulate answers. For example, one tutor read aloud directions to an internet-based task, used pauses when explaining the task, and then allowed the tutee to complete the task.

Slower rate of speech was used by about 80% of tutors while reading with or to the tutees and during modelling ('rolling...pin'). Slower rate of speech occurred especially when using formal academic language (CALP). Less reduction of vowels and consonant clusters was observed in the speech of more than 50% of the tutors as they modelled pronunciation for their tutees ('When you say that word, what does it sound like at the end? ELL: [washt] T: 'Yeah, it has that *t* sound, that *t*'). Tutors used less reduction of vowels and consonant clusters when clarifying instruction or upon observing the tutees' lack of comprehension. One third of the tutors used louder delivery to teach pronunciation and when exclaiming ('Not "A" – "E"!'), 'Good job!', 'Yes, I do!'). Louder delivery was also employed when giving instructions or explaining a task, asking questions, stressing particular words or sounds, and introducing new vocabulary.

#### **2. Morphological modifications**

In terms of morphological modifications, tutors used more basic vocabulary to facilitate tutees' comprehension of content. Specifically, approximately 70% of tutors used more basic vocabulary or synonyms to assist their tutees with comprehension (Example: 'chubby- a little fat'). About 20% of tutors did comprehension checks

('moon- la luna', 'yard- jardin', 'How do you say it [iron] in Farsi?'), sometimes through use of the tutees' L1 to ensure that they had an understanding of the content.

#### **3. Syntactical modifications**

Modifications in syntax included (a) fewer subordinate clauses, (b) shorter utterances, (c) higher proportion of simple present, and (d) higher proportion of well-formed sentences.

The majority of the tutors, about 90%, rarely used subordination when describing and explaining tasks. ('I have 6 sentences here that you wrote. I tried to make them similar to the story you told me. Please read them'). Subordinate clauses were rarely used when providing examples to support instruction. The level of the tutees was also a factor in the tutors' decision to use more complex clauses. There was little subordination in cases where the tutees were on the beginner level. Short utterances made up most of the tutors' discourse.

Over half of the tutors, 70%, regularly used short utterances and coordination ('The object of the game is to make matches, and you know how to make matches'. 'How are you?', 'Where are you from?', 'No other countries? Only Turkey and Iran?'). They also tended to use shorter utterances when trying to focus their tutees on the task at hand. Simple present is the tense used most frequently and commonly in the discourse of 90% of the tutors ('The stove is where you make soup or boil water'). The simple present was used when tutors clarified concepts for tutees and during formal instruction. Approximately 70% of the tutors' discourse was characterized by a higher proportion of well-formed sentences ('What is Thanksgiving?', 'Do you remember what we call these words?').

#### **4. Discourse modifications**

Tutors' discourse was characterized by (a) first-person reference, (b) teacher-initiated moves, (c) conversational frames, and (d) more self-repetitions.

Approximately 60% of tutors used first-person reference. However, there was a greater incidence of first person plural, for instance, when prefacing the activity involved ('Today we will be reading another article from the *New York Times*'). It was evident that as sessions progressed and tutors became more comfortable in their roles and as they got to know their tutees better, they used the first person more and shared personal anecdotes from their lives. The tutors' discourse included teacher-initiated moves. The majority of these initiations involved either questioning and/or was

instructionally focused ('Can you repeat it again?', 'Write it in your book'). About 1/3 of moves were of an affective nature ('You need a break? You need a stretch?').

About 80% of the tutors used conversation to discuss content and use alternative examples to support instruction. For example, one teacher compared numbers with people's ages to teach the concept of greater than and less than. More conversational frames were used in the first session as tutors tried to get to know their tutees ('How old are you?', 'Where do you live?', 'How about . . . ?'). Self-repetition was used in the discourse of 80% of tutors. Tutors repeated themselves in order to teach or reinforce pronunciation and to assist in comprehension. In many cases, repetition continued until tutees gave the correct response or indicated comprehension. ['Eleven take away one equals \_\_\_\_\_?' (repeated 3x), 'Read this paragraph. Read... Read... read for me'.].

### **Beyond Chaudron's framework**

#### ***Patterns of teacher discourse facilitating student learning***

In addition to Chaudron's (1988) framework, we observed that over 60% of the tutors used some form of praise ('Excellent!', 'Good job!', 'Very nice!', 'I'm very proud of you!'). One tutor frequently acknowledged when the tutee pronounced difficult words successfully. We have noted that over 60% of our tutors used the tutees' native language (L1) either for vocabulary explanation or clarification purposes.

#### ***Patterns of teacher discourse potentially inhibiting student learning***

Several tutors were observed interrupting their tutees when they either mispronounced or hesitated to pronounce a word. Teacher interruptions could potentially impede a student's learning.

#### ***The effects of the tutoring project on teacher discourse***

Additional findings evident from the tutoring journals, course documents, and individual and focus group interviews confirmed that the tutoring project allowed tutors to become aware of their language input and to modify it in order to offer an authentic and meaningful learning experience for their tutees. Tutors were required to analyse what happened during the tutoring sessions and write about what worked, what did not work, and why. Even though the tutoring project did not require them to focus on their language input specifically, reflecting on their tutoring experiences

helped them gain an awareness of their language and its effects on learners. Their level of awareness of their language input increased as observed in the followed tutoring journal:

K. and I worked on pronouncing words and identifying their meaning. I noticed that she had difficulty pronouncing words like *tree*, *three*, and *slept*. I would say the words very slowly then K. would repeat them but I would slow her down, so that she could articulate each syllable in the word we were pronouncing. Eventually we would say the word together and I would have her look at my mouth. We even tried using a small mirror so K. was able to see where to position her tongue when enunciating the word. K. was amazed by using the mirror because it gave her a guide on how and where to position her tongue.

The tutor in the example above demonstrated more explicit attention to the tutee's specific phonological difficulties, initially just pronouncing words, then slowing down the student's speech, pronouncing the words together, and finally using the mirror.

The next two representative quotes from tutoring journals indicate that tutors valued the tutoring project, which gave them the opportunity to reflect on their language input:

I feel that I benefited a great deal from the experience. I know that I have to work on my questioning techniques and be more careful not to provide answers too quickly.

I feel that my overall tutoring experience was very beneficial because it was my first ESL experience and it made me aware of how it is to teach an ESL learner. My [student] also benefited by accentuating words with *th* and *s* and it was rewarding.

Most tutors reflected on the experience in terms of the ways the tutoring allowed them to grow as reflective ESL practitioners.

### **Discussion**

Despite no formal explicit instruction, preservice ESL teachers used modified input in their tutoring projects. The quantity and quality of modified input varied depending on four linguistic areas: phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse. The discourse patterns observed in this study both reinforced and validated the model of teacher talk presented by Chaudron (1988) two decades ago and extended it into new subcategories. The findings that emerged were congruent with Chaudron's framework and indicated that the

tutors made appropriate modifications in their talk to enhance their students' comprehension and develop their English language learning skills.

Specifically, the tutors made phonological modifications that included exaggerated articulation, pauses, slower rate of speech, less reduction of vowels and consonant clusters, and louder delivery. In terms of morphological modifications, tutors used more basic vocabulary to facilitate students' comprehension of content. Modifications in syntax included fewer subordinate clauses, shorter utterances, higher proportion of simple present, and higher proportion of well-formed sentences. Tutors' discourse was characterized by more first-person reference, teacher-initiated moves, conversational frames, and more self-repetitions.

In addition to the findings consistent with Chaudron's model on discourse, tutors also made further modifications, used praise and the students' L1 to explain and clarify concepts. The discourse characteristics found, such as teacher modelling, repetition, and explanation/clarification are considered supportive of teacher talk (Yedlin 2004; Veque 2005; 2006).

As is evidenced in the study, the pre-service teachers did not always use the best discourse options, and not all of them modified their input as needed. For example, because of over-eagerness and lack of teaching experience, several tutors allowed their teacher talk to dominate the sessions. This has traditionally been the case in most classrooms (Piper 2006). Rather than waiting for learner output, tutors sometimes provided answers on behalf of their tutees, not giving them the opportunity to formulate their responses both cognitively and linguistically.

The tutoring project influenced pre-service teachers in a positive way in that it gave them the opportunity to develop the language skills of their ELLs and, in turn, their own metalinguistic awareness needed for growth as reflective practitioners. Despite the fact the project did not require the tutors to reflect on their language use specifically, it nevertheless gave them the opportunity to examine how their input was affecting their learners. Based on our findings, we firmly believe that future ESL teachers should be given the opportunity to develop metalinguistic awareness of their own language input in order to enhance language intake for their students. We concur with those who suggest that the use of teacher discourse should not be left to intuition and chance alone; rather, teacher training programmes should, as Walsh (2002) noted, make changes that assist future teachers in learning the

most effective ways to interact with students, thereby helping them to negotiate meaning and offering them the learning opportunities they need. This would mean offering assignments which require trainee teachers to examine their language input specifically and its effects on their learners.

We suggest that modified input does not occur by happenstance, but rather, by the conscious decisions that teachers make to promote learning (Forsyth et al. 1998). Therefore, teacher training should include explicit instruction in appropriate teacher talk. Modified input should be made more accessible to all language classrooms to facilitate literacy development (Dickinson & Tabors 2001). It is important for teachers to examine their own language input by audio- or video-taping lessons for self-critique and for teacher training programmes to provide guidance for teacher talk, interaction, and learning opportunities (Walsh 2002). Therefore, we propose providing explicit instruction on appropriate teacher discourse during one-on-one tutoring and encouraging pre-service teachers to analyse their own discourse. This way, they can begin to learn to monitor their use of language to optimize their ELLs' language learning experiences.

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APPENDIX

Sample data analysis matrix

Discourse	Categories	Discernible Patterns
More first person reference	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No. T makes more references to the second person.</li> <li>No. T uses mostly second person.</li> <li>T often uses first person plural.</li> <li>T reveals a little about herself more and more as the sessions progress.</li> <li>Throughout all sessions T does not make any first person reference or reveal anything about herself-- ELL attempts to make conversation about her.</li> <li>T makes more and more conversation and reveals more about herself with the ELL as the sessions progress. She also uses her last name to get the student to tell her hers.</li> <li>T uses first person plural, especially when giving instructions.</li> <li>T uses a lot of first person reference when justifying exercises/methodology.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second person rather than first person used.</li> <li>Greater incidence of first person plural.</li> <li>As sessions progress, Ts reveal and share more about themselves from a personal perspective.</li> </ol>
More teacher-initiated moves	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T tries to encourage ELL.</li> <li>T poses many questions and keeps momentum going.</li> <li>T also used personal pictures of her house and her dog to teach concept of prepositions.</li> <li>T's moves are instructionally focused.</li> <li>T displays genuine concern and care.</li> <li>T usually poses questions.</li> <li>T initiates moves more than S.</li> <li>T initiates conversation most of the time, usually through questioning and sometimes answering her own questions.</li> <li>ELL did not know what <i>stampede</i> means, but did not ask. When T thought ELL did not know a word meaning, she asked him to give a sentence with the word. ELL <u>never</u> asked for clarification of meaning.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher- initiated moves involved either questioning and/or were instructionally focused.</li> <li>Teacher-initiated moves were more of an affective nature.</li> </ol>
More conversational frames	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T does not lapse into conversational frames very often in sessions, and uses them more as encouragement.</li> <li>T engages S in conversation about spelling words and readings.</li> <li>T uses conversational frames to have the ELL use the forms she is teaching.</li> <li>T starts the tutoring session with conversational frames to needs analysis (with the ELL doing 98% of all the talking).</li> <li>T engages S in conversation at start of first session.</li> <li>T asks additional questions to expand on what S is learning.</li> <li>Gives alternative examples of meanings, help with pronunciation, and other ways to look at math problems.</li> <li>Gives an alternative example of how a word is used in a sentence each time the ELL's sentence did not seem to be a typical example of how the word is used.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T uses conversational frames to discuss content.</li> <li>T uses conversational frames at the first session as needs analysis and getting to know the S.</li> <li>T uses conversation to give alternative examples to support instruction.</li> </ol>
More self-repetitions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T uses repetition to emphasize and model the <i>th</i> sound.</li> <li>T repeats questions when S does not understand. T repeats explanation of how many times she will see S.</li> <li>T repeats herself a lot when the student does not comprehend. The stressing of the <i>d</i> sound, as in food-processor, is only done once in the sessions.</li> <li>T uses repetition for comprehension.</li> <li>T repeats herself in terms of the topic, past tense of verbs; however, she does not use repetition of particular words all that frequently throughout sessions.</li> <li>T repeats utterances until the S understands or repeats them clearly.</li> <li>Repeats question because S continues to give the wrong answer.</li> <li>T often repeats, reinforces hard-to-pronounce advanced vocabulary words twice in this pattern.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repetition used to teach/reinforce pronunciation.</li> <li>Repetition used to assist in comprehension.</li> </ol>
Other	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T often uses these two phrases of encouragement.</li> <li>T uses L1 to clarify meaning and to encourage S. T praises S frequently, especially when S is decoding and self-correcting. T uses chant or sing-song.</li> <li>T offers praise and changes intonation.</li> <li>T uses praise.</li> <li>T uses terms to reassure and encourage ELL.</li> <li>T praises S.</li> </ol>	<p>At least 2/3 of the participating teachers use some form of praise.</p>

Note: T stands for tutor and S indicates student.