

Teacher Talk: The Use of L1 vs. L2 in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Teacher talk is one of the aspects in second language acquisition in which the teacher talk functioned as the input for the learners. Besides providing input for the learners, teacher talk provides interaction in the classroom. The teacher talk in this study aims to discover the overall approach of the English lecturers to use *Bahasa Indonesia* (L1) and English (L2) in the classroom. The data of the study was gathered from the questionnaires and interview. The participants of the research were the lecturers of Language Training Center, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. The result findings show that the use of L2 is still dominant for each category in the discourse assessed through the questionnaires.

Keywords: *teacher talk, interaction, input*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher Talk (TT) is part of classroom interaction and second language acquisition, more specifically its contribution to classroom discourse. Teachers talk is one of the aspects that contribute to successful learning since it as part of the input for the language learning. Ellis (2008:784) describes that the classroom discourse pedagogic decision-making and the outcomes of language instruction are important aspects contribute in classroom interaction. There are some aspects that contribute in teaching activities such as the syllabus, method as well as the social

relationships that the teachers want to enhance. Those aspects become classroom interaction when they are acted out and co-produced with the learners. The interaction between the teacher and the learners play important roles in classroom activities. Appropriate teacher talk will result in harmonious relation among the teacher and the learners which in turns promote higher efficiency in classroom interactions. A suitable classroom interaction will enhance the input for learning, in this case the L2 learning since teacher talk plays as one of the inputs for the acquisition of L2.

Learning English in Indonesia has been either learn it as second language or foreign language which most of the use of English are in the classrooms where the control of teacher over the classroom activities are still high. To gain the interaction among the teacher and the learners sometimes the teachers use first language (L1) instead of the target language. This study aims to discover the approach to using *Bahasa Indonesia* (L1) vs. English (L2) in various aspects of language teaching.

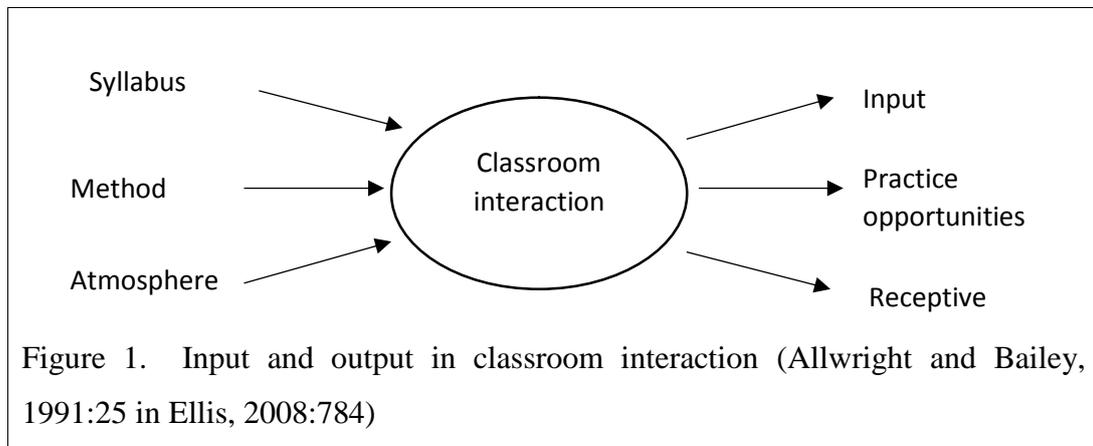
Teacher Talk has become the interest for the researchers and scholar for years and its role in classroom interaction as well as its function as the input Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Since it regards as the input for the learners to acquire second language, then there are some arguments of the use of L1 and L2 as language exposure in the classroom.

Classroom interaction is part of the acquisition in learning, in which when it relates to teacher-students interaction it is part of the action happen resulted from the lesson planned by the teacher for teaching-learning activities. Yanfen (2010:78) defines interaction as “the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings or ideas, between two or more people”. The learners get input to enhance their language ability use the

target language through the interaction with teachers. Interaction is an important concept for English language teachers. Long (1996 in Yanfen2010:78) argues that “Interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse and that provide learners with the input they need”. Learners get input from the interaction since it provides the learners with conversational and linguistics modifications which in turns will enable the learners to acquire the language they need comprehensively.

Ellis (2008) further elaborates classroom discourse pedagogic decision-making and the outcomes of language instruction. There are some aspects that contribute in teaching activities such as what to teach (syllabus), how to teach (method) as well as the social relationships (atmosphere) that the teachers want to promote. Those aspects become classroom interaction when they are acted out and co-produced with the learners. Interaction gives chance for the learners to get more input and more opportunities to practice L2 as their output. Allwright and Bailey (1991 cited in Ellis 2008:784) elaborates that interaction support the ‘state of receptivity’ in the learners which can be defined as ‘an active openness, a willingness to encounter the language and

the culture’. The relationship between plans and output in classroom interaction is illustrated in figure 1 below:



In language classroom settings, the teacher-learner interactive pattern in language classes is the most traditional pattern. In this pattern of interaction, the teacher plays the role of an expert, providing learners with direction and doing most of the talking and commenting (Lemke, 1990 cited in Yanfen).

There are some definitions used to elaborate the meaning of Teacher Talk. Teacher talk is defined as “a special register, analogous to foreigner talk” which in which it concerns with certain aspects such as ‘phonological’, ‘lexical’, ‘grammatical’ and ‘discoursal’.(Ellis 2008: 794). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines it as

That variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching. In trying to

communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners (Richards, 1992: 471).

The definition also refers to what Ellis (2008) stated that Teacher Talk is somehow related foreigner talk. It shows that in terms of teaching-learning activities the teacher often tries to make their language simpler to make the students understand the lesson as well as to adjust with their proficiency level. As Atkinson (1993: 4 in (Warford, 2009) states, “Failure to engender enough use of the target language in the classroom is one of the major methodological reasons for poor achievement levels in language learning”.

In terms of the use of Teacher Talk in both L1 and L2 setting, it is said that the features used in Teacher Talk

facilitate the acquisition of the language for the learners as stated by Wong Fillmore (1985 in Ellis:2008). The features that essential to support the acquisition is when the teacher try to avoid the use of translation, ensure the establishment of communication and the learners are able to comprehend it, avoid ungrammatical utterances, develop routines, develop repetition and suit the language used to the learners' level of proficiency as well as the richness of the language. Warford (2009) also describes that teacher talk also has the potential to encourage the development of interactional competence. However, the linguistic architecture of the FL classroom is weakened by layers upon layers of lexical chaining (Hall, 1995) such as in the form of drills and other form-focused activities which very little resemble the real communication. It is undeniable that the change where the teacher talk toward L2 has been only in language practice exercises.

In recent years there are researchers who also investigated the teacher talk among others are Lu Xio (2010) who investigated ways of teacher talk preferred respectively by teachers and students. Ma Xio (2006) also investigated the use of teacher talk in the English classroom setting which compare

the students' perception toward the ideal classroom learning and the real TT in the classroom. Many researchers in Indonesia also have investigated TT such as Astiti(2007) who discussed the teacher talk time.

Different classroom may have different structure of conducting the lesson as Mehan (1979 cited in Yanfen, 2010) found that the general subjects lesson consist of three categories, (1) opening phase, where the participants inform each other that they are going to conduct a lesson as opposed to some other activity, (2) business phase, where teacher and students exchanged information, and (3) a closing phase, where the core of the lesson is being reviewed.

According to Warford and Rose (2011) there are 5 categories of foreign language teacher talk, including: procedural (discourse related to the "nuts and bolts" of running the class), instructional discourse (related to the lesson content), offering and soliciting feedback (discourse related to individual class progress, repair sequences), spontaneous L2/ instructional conversation (opportunities for acquisition, the development of interactional competency), management / discipline (related to the promotion of

“engaged” and discouragement of disruptive / disengaged behavior.

It has been different perspectives on the use of L1 in foreign language context which resulted in complex and controversial issues. For instance, the interaction is perceived that it is important to emphasize the use of L2 in order to provide maximal exposure to L2 input. On the other hand, the socio cultural perceived that L1 can help the learners to scaffold their production in L2 (Ellis, 2008). There are studies that focus in on the use of L1 in the classroom such as Turnball and Arnett (2002) that surveyed the research on the teacher’s use of the L1. They pointed out that teacher as the main source of the TL in the classroom so that it is important to provide the maximum exposure to the target language. Didau (2013) explains that research has shown that the occasional use of L1 by both students and teachers increases both comprehension and learning of L2 (Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002; Wells, 1999).

Teachers often use L1 in beginning and intermediate classes to give instructions, explain meanings of words, explain complex ideas and explain complex grammar points (Tang, 2002 in Didau 2013). Many teachers find that the use of some L1 provides more time to

practice L2 because understanding is achieved much more rapidly. The teachers tend to use L1 to clarify after some attempt to communicate ideas in L2 and students still appear to be confused. The idea is that L1 serves a "supportive and facilitating role in the classroom" (Tang, 2002), and not that it is the primary language of communication. L1 use also allows students to become more aware of the similarities and differences between cultures and linguistic structures, and thus may improve the accuracy of translations.

METHODOLOGY

The study aims to assess the overall approach to using *Bahasa Indonesia* as the L1 in accordance with the use of the target language, English, as the L2. The questionnaires were distributed to the lecturers which approximately need 10 minutes to complete. Besides giving the questionnaires, informal interviews were also conducted to gain better understanding of the reasons in using L1 instead of L2 or the vice versa.

Participants and Instruments

The method used was questionnaires which were distributed to the English lecturers in Language Training Centre Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. There were 30

lecturers as the participants who taught level 2 up to level 8 and were chosen randomly. The lecturers are non-native speakers of English and shared the same L1, *Bahasa Indonesia* with their students. Based on the proficiency level of the students, the researcher then divided the group of participants into three groups; those who teach low level/ beginner (level 2&3), intermediate level (level 4, 5 and 6) and upper intermediate level (level 7 and 8) in which in each group there were 10 lecturers who answered the questionnaires.

The data were collected from the questionnaires and because of time limitation, the researcher did not conduct the video or transcript as the conjunction of the data collection. Instead, the researcher conducted informal interview with some of the lecturers to discover the reasons why they tend to use either L1 or L2 in their classes. The questionnaires were modified from the same form of questionnaires created by Warford and Rose (2011), which consists of 50 items in which 48 items is close-ended answers (ranging from 0% - 100%) of the use of L2 in the classroom and the last two questions are open which elaborate the reasons why the teacher tend to use certain language approach instead of another one (question no. 49) while

question no. 50 relates more on the questions being asked in the questionnaire, whether any item of the question is overlooked or not.

Procedure of Data Analysis

According to Parel (1979) descriptive research is the analysis of the concerns with one or all the following three tasks: (a) characterizing what is “typical” or common in a group; (b) indicating how widely the individuals in the group vary, and (c) presenting other aspects of the distribution of values with respect to the variables(s) being considered. In this study the researcher would like to characterize what language is commonly used by the lecturers in certain level either L1 or L2. Therefore, the result of the questionnaires was measured based on its mean, median and the mode.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Warford and Rose (2011) there are 5 categories of foreign language teacher talk, including:

1. Procedural (discourse related to the “nuts and bolts” of running the class)
2. Instructional discourse (related to the lesson content)

3. Offering and soliciting feedback (discourse related to individual class progress, repair sequences)
4. Spontaneous L2/ instructional conversation (opportunities for acquisition, the development of interactional competency)
5. Management / discipline (related to the promotion of “engaged” and discouragement of disruptive / disengaged behavior)

The analysis of the data is based on the aspects being asked to the lecturers without distinguish the level of the student’s proficiency being taught.

Procedural (discourse related to the “nuts and bolts” of running the class)

In this part of the questionnaires there are 13 questions related to the

discourse of running the class ranging from calling roll/ taking attendance, general announcements, attention signal, preparation check, giving directions for a class activity, time check, explaining work for outside of class, calling on students. Courtesy markers (i.e. Thank you), warm-ups (i.e. Date, weather, time, and review questions), and anticipatory set (generating prior knowledge of lesson topic, overview of lesson (agenda for lesson, goals of for the day), transitions ('Now that we've read the story, let's go to page...."). The analysis of the data based on the mean, median and mode of each question and the proficiency level of students are illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Mean, median and mode for each question based on the students’ level

LEVEL 2,3				LEVEL 4,5,6				LEVEL 7&8			
QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
1	75	75	70	1	82	85	70	1	75	100	100
2	60	50	50	2	61	65	70	2	90	95	100
3	78	80	50	3	80	85	100	3	90	100	100
4	80	80	100	4	80	90	100	4	50	90	100
5	63	50	50	5	72	70	70	5	51	90	100
6	70	80	10	6	60	90	50	6	97	100	100
7	49	50	50	7	69	70	80	7	89	95	100
8	69	75	100	8	73	75	70	8	91	100	100
9	81	90	100	9	83	100	50	9	57	90	100
10	64	70	70	10	73	80	60	10	95	100	100
11	50	55	20	11	67	60	50	11	90	60	50
12	50	50	50	12	70	70	70	12	88	95	100
13	71	80	50	13	81	80	80	13	51	100	100
MAX	81				83				97		
MIN	49				50				75		

It can be seen from the data that the lowest average for beginner level (level 2 and 3), is question no. 7 (explaining work

for outside of class such as homework, projects, exam study). The lecturers who teach for level 4 – 8 tend to use L1 when

they calling roll or taking attendance. While the highest average is on question no.9 (courtesy marker “Thank you”) since it is very easy for the learners to say as well as responding to the teacher’s utterance which is also appear to the intermediate level (level 4,5 and 6) as well as upper intermediate (level 7 and 8). The percentage that the lecturer often chose for answering the questionnaire is 50 (%) even though there were also some of them who gave 100(%) or always use L2 for questions no. 4,8 and 9 which regarding to preparation check (“Everyone ready?”), calling on students and courtesy markers “Thank you” respectively.

Instructional (discourse related to lesson content)

The second category of teacher talk is related to instructional or discourse related to lesson content. There are 13 questions related to the lesson content which varies from introducing the vocabulary, use of grammar and its explanation, culture instruction, practice (oral or written), presentation activities which related to students’ presentation in the form of oral and written, as well as the communication activities. As Tang (2002 cited in Didau) the L1 may be use in order to give instructions, explain meanings of words, explain complex ideas, explain complex grammar points.

Table2. Table mean, median and mode for questions 14-23

QUESTION	LEVEL 2,3			QUESTION	LEVEL 4,5,6			QUESTION	LEVEL 7&8		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
14	56	55	50	14	67	65	50	14	90	90	90
15	54	55	70	15	69	70	90	15	85	90	90
16	56	50	50	16	62	60	40	16	88	90	80
17	59	55	50	17	65	60	60	17	92	95	100
18	47	50	50	18	56	60	60	18	88	90	80
19	39	30	30	19	53	55	60	19	85	80	80
20	52	50	50	20	73	75	70	20	91	90	90
21	52	50	50	21	65	65	50	21	86	90	100
22	53	50	50	22	62	60	50	22	80	90	90
23	47	45	20	23	69	75	80	23	79	85	90
24	48	50	60	24	72	75	80	24	91	90	90
25	47	45	40	25	75	70	70	25	92	90	90
26	50	50	40	26	72	75	40	26	89	90	90
MAX	59			MAX	75			MAX	92		
MIN	39			MIN	53			MIN	79		

In average for level 2 and 3 the lecturers tend to use L2 for question item no. 17 (extension scenarios or providing examples). While for level 4, 5, and 6 as well as level 7 and 8 they use L2 for question no. 25 (presentation activities: student oral presentation). It means that in the higher level, the lecturers provide the opportunity for the students to speak a lot in the classroom activities compared to the lower level. However, level 7 and 8 also describe the highest level of the lectures in using L2 the same as level 2 and 3 for question no. 17 extending scenarios or providing examples. Therefore, it can be concluded that translating from L1 to L2 is limited in providing the examples related to the lesson content.

Culture extension (question no. 19) is perceived as the lowest use of L2 in level 2,3, 4, 5, and 6 since the lecturers need to explain the cross-cultural understanding in L1. It is also supported by the result of informal interview that the lecturers who teach those levels tend to use L1 to avoid misunderstanding in explaining the different culture. While for the upper intermediate the use of L2 tend to be loosening in open-ended

communication skills which the activities are less form-focused.

Offering and soliciting feedback

The third category discusses the discourse related to individual or class progress as well as repair sequences. The individual progress and repair sequences including praising, the use of IRE (Input, Response, Evaluation of accuracy), implicit and explicit correction, feedback on students' performance either individually or as a group, as well as checking the student's comprehension and close the lesson. Warford (2014) proposed that classroom discourse should press candidates beyond traditional IRE (teacher initiates, student responds, teacher evaluates) scripts, and extend opportunities for students to manage topics. The concept of instructional conversation points toward classroom interaction that is less mechanical and more supportive of "equal turn-taking rights".

The offering and soliciting feedback as discourse related to individual, class progress as well as repair sequences for each question in the questionnaire is presented below.

Table3. Table mean, median and mode for questions no. 27-36

QUESTION	LEVEL 2,3			QUESTION	LEVEL 4,5,6			QUESTION	LEVEL 7&8		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
27	56	60	70	27	84	85	95	27	94	100	100
28	61	60	60	28	84	80	90	28	92	80	90
29	41	45	30	29	79	80	80	29	84	90	80
30	43	45	30	30	73	75	60	30	86	90	100
31	51	55	60	31	68	60	50	31	90	90	90
32	42	45	30	32	75	80	80	32	91	95	100
33	40	40	30	33	70	60	60	33	92	95	100
34	47	45	30	34	77	80	60	34	90	100	100
35	77	80	80	35	86	90	100	35	97	100	100
36	76	80	100	36	81	75	100	36	89	95	100
MAX	77			MAX	86			MAX	97		
MIN	40			MIN	68			MIN	84		

Based on the data, the average lecturers use the highest level of L2 in all of the learners' levels is for question no. 35 (check for student comprehension, e.g. "Any Question?") since it is the common questions that the teacher asks when he/she wants to check the students comprehension. While for the beginner level the use of feedback for paired/small group feedback on performance (question no. 33), progress serves the lowest average. Compared to the intermediate and upper intermediate, explicit correction of students' error (no. 31) and answering the students questions perceived as the lowest level of using L2 in average respectively.

The tendency to answer the questions for beginner level falls to 30% of using L2 in their classroom, while for the intermediate use 60% of their classroom learning and the upper

intermediate most of them replied that they always use L2 in their classrooms. Based on the interview with the lecturers who teach the upper intermediate tend to use L2 all the time since the student's proficiency level are very good and some of them are from abroad especially for the international classes.

Spontaneous L2/ instructional conversation

The fourth category gives the opportunity for language acquisition in real communication as well as the development of interactional competency. Those spontaneous L2 including facilitating class discussion, incidental anecdote, incidental culture notes, eliciting more student talk which known as IRF, spontaneous conversation, expressing sympathy, expressing humor as well as gives comment on students' interest. The data for the mean, median

and mode for each question in this part is presented in the table below.

Table 4. Mean, median and mode for questions no. 37-44

QUESTION	LEVEL 2,3			QUESTION	LEVEL 4,5,6			QUESTION	LEVEL 7&8		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE		MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
37	54	55	50	37	77	80	90	37	88	90	80
38	41	40	30	38	53	50	50	38	76	75	60
39	42	40	30	39	63	60	40	39	78	75	70
40	63	65	50	40	74	70	100	40	94	100	100
41	47	50	70	41	66	60	60	41	82	80	80
42	69	70	50	42	71	70	50	42	91	100	100
43	53	50	30	43	52	55	60	43	80	80	80
44	52	50	30	44	73	65	60	44	91	95	100
MAX	69			MAX	77			MAX	94		
MIN	41			MIN	52			MIN	76		

The highest average of using L2 for the beginner level falls on question no. 42 (express in sympathy or concern) while the lowest average use of L2 or in other words the lecturers tend to use L1 when dealing with incidental anecdotes. This kind of phenomena happened since when they make anecdotes in English, the students do not understand the “funny” things on it. It almost the same with the intermediate level in which the lecturers choose to use L1 instead of L2 when they are expressing humor to avoid misunderstanding or the students may not understand at all the funny expressions. However, when they facilitate classroom discussion, they tend to use higher L2 instead of L1.

The result is quite different from those who teach the upper intermediate level. According to them they use more

L2 when eliciting more student talk (IRF) by asking further questions to the students (no. 40) while the lowest average of using L2 or they use L1 more instead of L2 when they come up with incidental anecdote which is the same option that the beginner level lecturers tend to have it too. Based on the interview, they also have the same issue with those who teach other levels that usually the students do not understand of the anecdote or humor in English.

The use of L2 is still low in the beginner level which means classroom activities conducted in *Bahasa Indonesia*. This finding is also supported by the interview with the lecturers especially those who teach beginner level that they use L1 as the alternatives when explaining the topics that beyond the students’ comprehension. However, in

the higher level, it shows that the use of L2 is doubled (60%) of them use L2 instead of L1 in spontaneous L2 or the instructional conversation which means that the opportunity for acquisition as well as the developmental of interactional competency is higher. Meanwhile, the upper intermediate lectures still focus on always using L2 even though sometimes

switch coding is used when they are dealing with expressing humor.

Management/discipline

There are four items/ questions in classroom management or discipline related to the promotion of ‘engage’ and discouragement of disruptive / disengaged behavior such as encouraging on-task behavior, discouraging off-task behavior, and reminder of rules.

	LEVEL 2,3				LEVEL 4,5,6				LEVEL 7&8		
QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	QUESTION	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
45	46	50	60	45	76	75	100	45	89	95	100
46	37	40	60	46	65	60	50	46	88	90	100
47	40	45	60	47	71	70	50	47	84	90	100
48	50	50	50	48	66	65	60	48	81	90	90
MAX	50			MAX	76			MAX	89		
MIN	37			MIN	65			MIN	81		

There are four questions under this category; however, the last question is intended for overall feedback toward the use of L2 over L1. This will be described in other findings for more complete elaboration.

Related to classroom management, both the intermediate and upper intermediate lecturers use L2 more often to encourage on-task behavior (question no. 45). While for discouraging off-task (question no. 46) behavior they tend to use L1 as it depicted from the result of beginner and intermediate level.

Other Findings

The item questions number 48 and 49 in the questionnaire is intended to see the overall approach of using L1 vs. L2 in the classroom. The lecturers stated that the use of L2 will be less in the beginner level overall classroom approach, while the intermediate and upper intermediate use L2 more often since the proficiency level of the students are higher. Based on the answers of those who teach upper intermediate, they use L2 most of the time to provide as much exposure to the students. They use L1 as the last option when they found out that

the language units being discussed is complicated, or to explain the meaning of new words after they try to find out the synonym for the words. However, the cultural note and humor express during the classroom activities still considered high in using L1.

The lecturers who teach for beginner level also find out that jokes or humor in English sometimes still difficult to understand by the students. They also found out that the study program of the students also influences the lecturers in conduction the lesson, even though they have the same level, they presumed that the students who have low ability in English are less motivated in learning English. Even though the students are less motivated or there are other boundaries in using L2 as the input, but the lectures tend to encourage the students to answer questions or even simple response to get used to speak English. Hence, translation and code switching are usually used for those who teach beginner levels in order to establish better understanding without neglecting the fact that they need higher exposure in learning English.

CONCLUSION

The use of L1 to give instructions, explain meanings of words, explain

complex ideas, explain complex grammar points (Tang, 2002 in Didau 2013) are acceptable to suit the students need. The findings of the study also confirm those arguments, without neglecting the fact that teacher talk plays an important role as the input or exposure for the students to learn English.

Warford (2009) suggests that FL teachers are both the architect of acquisition and sensitive counselors because the teachers can design the materials, method and input necessary for the students to achieve the acquired knowledge as well as the language acquisition. Moreover, the teachers talk which functions as the tool of interaction with the students to provide the language exposure need the higher understanding from the teachers. Therefore, teachers also become sensitive counselor who can see the ability of the students to comprehend in L2 as well as their development psychologically.

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