

# SPEECH MODIFICATIONS USED IN INDONESIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the range of modifications (input, interaction, and information choice) used by non-native speaker EFL teachers in two private primary schools in Indonesia. Data were recorded over a number of classrooms teaching sessions and analysed to identify the modifications. The analysis reveals that both teachers use the same forms of speech modifications with the exception of the use of code-switching. Moreover, the degree of English to which students are exposed depends on their initial English proficiency. The extent and type of these teachers' speech modifications are determined by contextual issues. Issues such as school policies, classroom management, and the background and expectations of students and their parents, influence the way in which speech modifications are employed by teachers.

**Keywords:** speech modifications, primary schools, non-native speakers, EFL classrooms

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modification of speech by EFL teachers seems to be a common characteristic of language classrooms around the world [1,2]. Successful speech modification, which reduces breakdowns and misunderstandings, contributes to input comprehension and ensures that students feel comfortable to participate in the interaction, thus facilitating learning outcomes [1(p.5)].

According to Lynch [3], there are 3 areas of modification in teacher-to-learner language; input, interaction, and information choice. Lynch's categorization is preferred to Chaudron's because of its clearly defined nature. Lynch's input modifications [3] cover verbal and non-verbal behaviour. For the purposes of this article, the researchers are concerned only with verbal behaviour or speech. It is further restricted to following the definition of speech in the theory of speech acts, concentrating on those utterances produced by teachers in a communicative activity with their students [4].

To aid a more thorough analysis, the researchers supplement Lynch's categorization with findings from other studies, as they are relevant to the current context. Speech modifications are therefore analysed according to the following forms. Input modifications can follow the form of the use of more common vocabulary, nouns rather than pronouns, spelling, the avoidance of idiom, shorter utterances, less complex utterances, increased use of present tense, fewer modal verbs, slower speech, clearer articulation, less vowel-reduction, greater stress differentiation, more pauses, longer pauses, and more frequent use of standard forms [3(p.39,41), 5, 6, 7(p.62,63)]. Interaction modifications are performed by using confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, repetition, completion, and code-switching [3(p.47), 7(p.61,62)]. With regard to information choice, Lynch [3(p.49)] mentions 2 ways in which it can be used, either to provide more descriptive detail or to add socio-cultural information. A third way in which it is used, is backtracking. Lynch [3(p.47)] considers this to be an interaction modification but it is analysed here as belonging to information choice because of the manner in which it is used by the teachers.

The use of code-switching is additional to those in Lynch's categorization. Urano in Lin [7(p.33,34)] mentions four types of self-repetition; partial, exact, expansion and paraphrase. Following Urano, reformulation, is excluded from Lynch's categorization as it is considered to be the same as paraphrase, and thus, a type of repetition. Polio and Duff claim that the use of L1 may be dependent on teacher's English proficiency, teaching experiences, departmental policy guidelines, lesson content, and material [7(p.38)].

## 2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Lynch asserts the importance of the combination of interaction modifications and input modifications. This is supported by Yang's study of Taiwanese freshmen EFL classrooms. She demonstrates that interaction modifications, when combined with input modifications, increase listening comprehension and acquisition of new vocabulary. Analysis is restricted to verbal behaviour, and conforming to Lynch's categorization, does not include code-switching [8(p.38,39, 51,57,58,59,60)].

Another study in the same country includes the use of code-switching. L1 is frequently used because the teacher believes that speaking English all the time might hinder student understanding of instructions and grammar material. The teaching goal of understanding lesson content is prioritised over methods [7(p.38)].

Supporting Lynch's claim, Maleki and Pazhakh [9] have investigated the effects of pre-modified input, interactionally modified input, and modified output on the comprehension of new vocabulary by Iranian freshmen. Participants were split into 4 groups, each employing a different method; interaction modification, output modification (not relevant to the current study), input modification and control group. Pre-modified input and interactionally modified input is consistent with the Lynch categorization. The researchers determined that interaction modifications were the most effective assistance despite not employing L1 and repetition. Highest scores were achieved by the interaction modifications group, followed by output modifications group, input modifications group, and the control group in descending order. There was no significant difference between the two lowest groups and code switching was used only in the control group. A greater variety of input modifications may have contributed more, but the lack of variation in the scores between the input modifications group and the control group suggests that the use of L1 makes a significant contribution.

In an Indonesian primary school EFL classroom context, a study carried out by Rohmah [10] in East Java, focused on the speech modifications in the questions of a non-native speaker English teacher with 2nd and 3rd grade students. Most of Lynch's categories were used and the use of L1 was also evident. It was found that L1 was used to help students of lower English proficiency to understand a question as in "My brother *artinya apa?*" (What do the words 'my brother' mean?). A similar question, "What does the word 'cultivate' mean?" which does not contain any use of L1 was directed at students with a higher level of English proficiency. In another Indonesian study, Zainil [11] also found frequent use of L1 in elementary schools in West Sumatra, when students were of lower English proficiency. Her study recorded the use of 2 different L1s.

This discussion supports the findings of the current study in that it demonstrates the possibility that the use of L1 can be considered as a modification dependent on a certain context, the context in which students are of lower English proficiency. In such contexts, it offers a significant contribution. In the current study, L1 is used when there is lower overall English proficiency and it is avoided when there is a higher level of proficiency.

Lynch [3(p.69,70)] evaluates a story-telling experiment carried out by Derwing in 1989. It involved 16 pairs of native and non-native speakers of English. After watching a silent animated film, every native speaker was asked to narrate the story from memory to a low-intermediate level non-native listener. Six questions were given to test the listeners' comprehension. Derwing found out that listeners achieved better understanding when they were only told the main event, without too much background detail, but in an explicit coherent way. Lynch suggests that in order to provide a proper amount of detail, the speaker should consider the listener's background knowledge.

### 3. THE CURRENT STUDY

This study is descriptive in nature. Its goal is to build on the current literature by examining and describing the full range of speech modifications used by 2 non-native speaker English teachers of 3rd grade students in 2 private school EFL classrooms in Surabaya, Indonesia. It was not designed as an experimental study and therefore did not investigate causal relationships between different speech modifications and other factors such as students' level of input comprehension, or students' level of acquisition.

This paper contributes to current knowledge of EFL teaching practices by providing more description on the way in which 2 non-native speaker EFL teachers employ speech modifications. They have different approaches to the use of English in class and this is linked to the different contexts determined by the schools in which they work. The findings, which contribute knowledge about EFL teaching in the Indonesian context, may be expected to improve the quality of EFL teaching in similar types of schools in Indonesia. In terms of international readers, these findings may provide insights for both native and non-native speaker EFL teachers who work in differing contexts and with students at varying levels of English proficiency.

The subjects have been given the pseudonyms, 'Ms. Laras' and 'Ms. Shinta'. Ms. Laras is a Chinese Indonesian and Ms. Shinta is a Javanese Indonesian. Ms. Laras works in 'X' international school and Ms Shinta in 'Y' private national school. They teach English classes which focus on reading and grammar. Ms. Laras believes that English should be the only language used in English class, while Ms. Shinta believes that L1 can be used whenever necessary.

Children are sent to 'X' International Primary School to study English more seriously. English is the medium of instruction in 7 non-English classes. English is both the object of the study and the medium of instruction in English class. Indonesian is only used when it is taught as a subject.

English is studied as a subject and is the intended medium of instruction in English class in 'Y' National Private Primary School. Other subjects are delivered in Indonesian. A comparison of student characteristics in the two classes can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** ESLclass student background details

	<b>Ms. Laras' Class</b>	<b>Ms. Shinta's Class</b>
Student Background:	14 students: 1 Taiwanese, 2 mixed (Taiwanese and Indonesian), 11 Chinese Indonesians	21 Indonesians: most are Javanese Indonesians, no Chinese Indonesians
Proficiency Level:	Medium-High	Varied
Mother Tongue:	Mandarin/Indonesian	Javanese and Indonesian
Learning Frequency:	4 times a week	Twice a week.
Social/Economic Status:	High	Medium - Low

#### 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The researchers adopted a qualitative approach, analysing data collected during a fourteen-week, 28 meeting period in the 2012/2013 school year. Each meeting provided data from 45 minute classroom interactions. Data were collected using video-recording, in-depth interview, and observation. In-depth interview was selected as a secondary data collection technique since it is considered important for triangulation [12]. During analysis the researchers identified data, which exemplified the categories in the input modifications, interaction modifications, and modifications of information choice lists. Interviews with the teachers were conducted for clarifying the modifications and the school policy.

#### 5. INPUT MODIFICATIONS

Both teachers use exactly the same forms of input modifications: the use of more common vocabulary, nouns rather than pronouns, spelling, avoidance of idiom, the use of shorter and less complex utterances, the increased use of present tense, the use of fewer modal verbs, the use of slower speech, clearer articulation, less vowel-reduction, greater stress differentiation, more pauses, longer pauses, and more frequent use of standard forms.

In order to ensure better comprehension, the teachers prefer to use more common vocabulary, such as “change” instead of “amend” in “Why do you have to change ‘sleep’?” The importance of using more common vocabulary at this level leads to the avoidance of idiom, which was reported by the teachers as being too difficult to introduce at this level. Some examples show that even a non-idiomatic expression like, “Open your ears” was still too difficult for most students.

In general interactions, nouns were used more often than pronouns to make the message more obvious. A noun is often used for explanations, instructions or in questions. “I’m going to turn on the CD. I am going to play it”, is chosen instead of “I am going to turn it on.” The pronoun “it” is used but only after the teacher mentions the noun ‘CD’. “I want you to write the conversation.” is said instead of “I want you to write it”, or “What does Robert share with his mother?” is selected instead of “What does he share with her?”

Spelling enhances comprehension and memorisation of new or unusual words. While it may not normally be seen as a speech modification, in the current study it is used as such by the teachers who stop at various points during an interaction for the purpose of spelling new vocabulary. In this way it is used by them in the way that they use other input modifications. Teachers may stop and spell words directly without asking the students or they may ask students to provide the spelling and then correct it if necessary.

Present tense was the most frequently used tense during the lesson. This does not mean that other tenses were not used. In order to equip students to communicate in the real world [13], past, present perfect, present continuous and future tense were also used. In addition, they mostly used short and simple utterances for ease of comprehension. One example is the way they ignore modal verbs seen in the example, “Yesi join Judi, Judi join Yesi”. However, in certain situations, such as when a complete description was needed, a much longer utterance was produced.

Both teachers understand that speaking slowly also has a significant influence on students’ comprehension. Pauses and longer pauses are evidence that they are trying to make their interactions clear. Pauses serve various purposes: to give the students a chance to follow the instructions; to give students a chance to answer questions; and to prepare students to listen to important information. In Ms. Laras’ case, pauses are also used when students are reluctant to follow her instructions for various reasons. Both teachers have to speak even more slowly to allow time for the understanding of an important message, to identify and correct mistakes, to demonstrate different sounds in words which have similar spelling and to introduce new words. It is clear that both teachers understand their students’ needs for slow input, in terms of the meaning processing mechanism. They understand that it is a complex and dynamic task for the students as non-native speakers of English to both process the data they have received, and to focus on the remainder of the incoming messages. Meaning processing is complicated because words, once spoken, cannot be replayed for review; and in the EFL context, the language being studied is the medium through which academic content is delivered. As processing the input takes longer than delivery of the input, slower speech, therefore helps students to access more processing time and gain a greater understanding of the segmentation of the structures in the input [2(p.154), 14].

Clearer articulation, the other form of input modifications, is used when teachers introduce new vocabulary. It is also used to demonstrate the difference in pronunciation in words which have similar sounds or spellings, for example, “pepper and paper” or “beach and peach”. In order to emphasize the difference, the teacher pronounces the first word louder than the second. In addition to the clearer articulation, the teachers present many words at a slower rate and with greater stress differentiation to assist with the acquisition of English phonological patterns. Examples of this include first syllable stress patterns on nouns such as “carrot” or “salad” and the stress on the first syllable of “shopping” to emphasize the spelling pattern. Both teachers also tend not to reduce any vowels whenever they need to emphasize an important message, and this is combined with the use of slower speech, increased vocal volume and repetition.

As a further aid to clarity, both teachers use Standard American English. This is the most common form in Indonesia, but it is also more beneficial for students because they are studying English for formal usage. There are at least 3 benefits for Ms. Laras’ students: it helps students from different countries to understand the

teacher's message, it helps students to listen to the lesson from CDs which commonly employ this form, and it prepares students for their study in English speaking countries in the future.

## 6. INTERACTION MODIFICATIONS

The second area of teachers' speech modifications is interaction modifications. The forms discussed here include; confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, repetition, completion and the employment of L1.

Repetition of students' utterances sometimes functions as a confirmation check. Following either one, or a combination of comprehension checks and clarification requests, a confirmation check acts as a compilation of the information obtained from both.

Comprehension checks and clarification requests in isolation also play a significant role in assisting students. Ms Laras' class was discussing a passage entitled 'People Who Help Us'. In order to clarify the level of understanding and comprehension of the details of the story, Ms Laras asks questions which require the students to respond in a way which retells the story. Another example can be found in the context of a lesson about tense. Ms. Shinta asked her students to change 5 sentences from Simple Present Tense into Simple Past Tense. Some were able to change "Nina sleeps in the bedroom." to "Nina slept in the bedroom." Others were unable to make the change so Ms. Shinta gave a comprehension check, "Why do you change the word, 'sleep'?" The student who could change the sentence into Simple Past answered, "It is the action." She hoped that the students would identify it as a verb rather than an activity, so, she made a clarification request, "What do we call a word which we use for an action?" This time, a student replied, "Verb." These two modifications were intended to make clear to the students that the verbs were the words which should be changed.

Related to repetition, both teachers repeat their own words and those of their students. In Ms. Laras' listening session, the repetition is also after the words of native speakers on a CD whenever they are too difficult for the students. She uses repetition to: ensure comprehension; plant the right stress in the students' minds; focus students on the lesson; correct students' pronunciation; emphasise the right answer; and signal a grammatical error. Since Ms. Laras avoids employing L1, she depends a lot on repetition. She uses all types of repetition: exact repetition; expansion repetition; repetition of part of an utterance; and paraphrase. On the other hand, Ms Shinta uses fewer repetitions than Ms. Laras, and usually only to ensure comprehension and to emphasise the right answer. She does not use expansion repetition and she only repeats her own words and the students' utterances because she does not use CDs.

The other form of interaction modifications is completion. Both teachers complete a student's unfinished answer after giving some time for an attempt. At other times, they leave utterances unfinished to give students an opportunity to finish it for them.

In this study it is obvious that the L1 employment relates closely to the teachers' beliefs. In-depth interview data demonstrates that Ms. Laras believes that English teachers should speak only English at all times to encourage students to speak English. Therefore, she avoids code-switching, in this case, switching to the use of L1. This L1 avoidance, which conforms to Lynch's categorization and to Yang's study, is possible because of the reported higher levels of English proficiency among her students.

Interview data also provides evidence that Ms. Shinta believes that English teachers do not need to speak English all the time, and that they can use L1 to help students understand their message. Examples show that she depends a lot on L1 to make her speech clear for the students. Besides English, Ms Shinta also uses Indonesian and Javanese languages.

In line with Lin's study, the use of L1 in Ms. Shinta's class is dependent on several factors mentioned by Polio and Duff. The first relates to Ms. Shinta's English proficiency. She lacks sufficient ability to simplify her explanations using English. During a vocabulary exercise for instance, she asked her students to match the pictures in the book with the proper sentences. One student asked his friends in Javanese "Nothing *iku opo yo?*" (What is the meaning of nothing?) Nobody answered. Ms. Shinta then answered him in Indonesian "Nothing *itu tidak ada.*" She did not say in English, "Nothing does not mean anything." or "Nothing means no thing." She was unable to explain it in this way because the student would have become more confused.

The use of L1 in the above context may also relate to the second factor, Ms. Shinta's teaching experience. If she had more teaching experience in handling students with low level English proficiency, she may not need to use such a short cut, in this case the employment of L1, but would have the option of a more effective strategy.

The third factor is the school policy. Ms. Shinta is free to use L1 because there is no prohibition to use L1 from the school. The 'Y' Primary School is not an international school so it is not a requirement for the teacher to use English all the time. In addition, Ms. Shinta's class does not belong to the International Class Program in which English is the language of instruction.

The fourth factor is lesson content. In this context, the focus of the lesson is reading and grammar, not speaking. Hence, the goal is to make students understand the reading and the grammar materials, not to make students use the target language. This also influences Ms. Shinta's use of L1, which she sees as the best strategy to promote understanding of the reading and grammar materials.

The fifth factor is material difficulty, and it usually relates to grammatical or vocabulary difficulty. The first example is "Have you got it? *Sudah ketemu?*" Non-standard Indonesian is employed because the students have not yet learnt about present perfect tense. The purpose is to clarify grammatical points. The second example is "*Simpan guntingmu* (put your scissors aside) and write the number beside the right picture." Standard Indonesian is employed here because the words "put aside" and "scissors" are too difficult for the students. The purpose is to

translate vocabulary items. Another example contains a Javanese word, "Are you sure that you are *pikun*(senile)?" is used as a response to her student's utterance "*Aku sudah pikun.*"(I have already become senile). Javanese is used because the students have not learnt the word "senile". In addition, Ms. Shinta wants to build rapport with the student by teasing him. The other example is when Ms. Shinta needed to explain about the plural form of "loaf" in which spelling and pronunciation are different from the singular form. L1 was also used for introducing new words as in these examples from one conversation, "... number nine *itu merawat binatang peliharaan* (is taking care of pets.)" and, "*Ini banyak yang salah ya?* (Did many of you make mistakes?)", which had the function of promoting communication. In summary, it can be said that the L1 is used whenever students lacked the grammatical or lexical competence to deal with the material that was being presented.

It is possible to use L1 in Ms. Shinta's class and in one of the contexts in Lin's study because the two teachers have several things in common. They have the same belief that speaking English all the time might hinder students from understanding English instructions and grammar material. Moreover, they have the same teaching goal, which is to make students understand the lesson content. In addition, the findings of the current study which indicate that L1 is needed where there is lower English proficiency, also accord with the findings of Maleki and Pazhakh's, Zainil's and Rohmah's studies.

Ms. Shinta depends heavily on L1 to ensure comprehension. This use of L1 creates a significant impact on other forms of speech modifications. By contrast, Ms Laras' avoidance of L1 provides a different perspective on the use of speech modifications. She ensures comprehension without L1. In summary, they use the same forms of speech modifications but the degree to which they exploit the forms is different.

In most contexts, input modifications, interaction modifications, and modifications of information choice are used in combination. Repetition was the most commonly used form of interaction modification, and it was often combined with input modifications and modifications of information choice. For example, it was combined with short utterances, less complex utterances, pauses and providing more descriptive detail. The greater emphasis required by a message, the more forms of speech modification were used. On other occasions, repetition, combined with other forms of input modifications, was also used as an interaction adjustment. This is in line with Lynch's findings [3(p.43,47,48)].

## 7. MODIFICATIONS OF INFORMATION CHOICE

It is obvious that the 3 forms of modifications to information choice; providing more descriptive detail, adding socio-cultural information and backtracking were used by both teachers. For example, when a student asked how many pages it was necessary to read, Ms. Laras provided extra details as to the number of the answer sheets every student would receive, and explained the divisions within the reading passage. In a second example, a student was confused as to which grammar exercise he was required to do. Ms. Shinta, understanding his needs, also gave him some hints about how to do the exercise. In providing more descriptive detail, both teachers often used repetition.

Giving extra socio-cultural information was necessary to demonstrate the difference between soccer and football, and to explain Westerners' use of a knife during meal-time to students who had only ever used chopsticks. This kind of information supports the understanding of the material discussed in the Students' Book. Neither teacher gave excessive amounts of detail or information. They generally considered their students' background knowledge, which is in line with Lynch's suggestion [3(p.69,70)]. Most of Ms. Shinta's students never go abroad, and too much socio-cultural information would therefore only make them confused. Derwing [3(p.70)] states that an excessive amount of information is more confusing than too little.

Backtracking was employed by these teachers in different ways. When students made mistakes, Ms Laras would refer to an example in the workbook which had been understood by the students in the previous week. She returned to a point of understanding to bring students to the right answer. In contrast, Ms. Shinta reminded her students more directly about a pattern which she knew to have been understood by the students in a prior meeting. In these circumstances the speech modification which is chosen by teachers, is to present some previous information, which they know the students understood, in order to bridge the gap of misunderstanding at the current point of discussion.

## 8. COMPARISON

The study demonstrates that while both teachers use many of the same speech modification types to increase comprehension, there are some differences related to context. It is obvious that both teachers use input modifications, interaction modifications and modifications of information choice in combination to obtain the best solution and to achieve maximum results. However, they also have different challenges to face. Ms. Laras is required to speak English all the time and her students easily lose focus. Ms. Shinta teaches 21 students with varying levels of English proficiency. According to the interview, some students have a high level, while, most of them have middle to low level, and one student has a very low level of English proficiency. These different challenges lead them to choose different forms of speech modifications. The main difference is in the use of L1 which influences the degree of usage of other forms of speech modifications. Ms. Laras who avoids L1 demonstrates a greater use of other forms of speech modifications, such as repetition, pauses and longer pauses. Both teachers utilize the same forms of modifications with regard to information choice.

## 9. EFFECT UPON SUCCESS OF LEARNING

The main goal of language learning is undoubtedly; to enable students to use the target language and therefore it could be argued that avoidance of L1 may be more effective in achieving acquisition of the target language. Ms. Laras always speaks English with her students inside and outside the classroom. The result is her students also speak English in class. They even prefer to speak English outside the class without any teacher supervision. On the contrary, Ms. Shinta's class is full of students who seldom speak English either with Ms Shinta or with their friends, inside or outside class. They are not challenged to use English, but it is difficult to determine the role of the use of L1 in this situation. To help students to develop their skills in use of the target language, the teacher should become the role model. In other words, the teacher should use the target language as much as possible, even though the focus of the lesson is on reading and grammar. To help her students to understand her message in English, Ms. Shinta could increase the use of other forms of input modifications, interaction modifications and modifications of information choice. Her consistent use of English may then encourage her students to speak English or at least, increase their listening skills.

## 10. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study indicates that the 2 teachers employ the same forms of speech modification with the main difference being their use of L1. In addition, the degree of English to which students are exposed depends on their English proficiency. Input modifications, interaction modifications and modifications of information choice, which are blended with one another in application, are used in total and non-total English exposure. Often more than 1 form of modification is used at the same time and the level of importance of the message often dictates the number of different forms used to deliver the message. The extent and type of these teachers' speech modifications are determined by the involvement of contexts like school policy and classroom management. School policy relates to students' English proficiency level, the students' placement, number of classes in a week, and the location of the English class. Speech modification is not just intended to help students understand the teacher's message but also to manage the class. The teacher's choice of speech modification has an impact on the use of the target language by the students. If the teacher likes using L1 instead of English in class, students are not encouraged to speak English. If teachers were to become more aware of their own use of speech modifications and their reasons for using them, they could make more informed choices and thereby plan for better learning outcomes for students at various levels of proficiency.

The results of this study also contribute to theory and practice. They bring some understanding of theoretical aspects of teacher's speech modification in the context of EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Theoretically, it may suggest the addition of L1 is essential to a more accurate categorization of interaction modifications. Practically, it could broaden the perspective of the readers who are interested in improving the quality of English teaching. Moreover, they may aid primary school English teachers to become aware of, and evaluate their current speech modifications to determine whether or not they have supported or obstructed the progress of the student's communicative performance. They may also offer English teachers some guidance in making their speech more conducive to learning, and they may be helpful to English Departments in planning for improving resources. It is also hoped that they will be a catalyst for further SLA classroom research, especially in the area of classrooms with lower levels of English proficiency.

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