Analysis of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication in Grade 11 EFL Classroom Interaction

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to analyze verbal and non-verbal communication in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by using the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model of classroom discourse. Although many studies have examined verbal interaction in EFL classrooms, few have discussed how verbal and non-verbal communication work together to support effective learning. To fill this gap, this research focuses on identifying the types and frequency of verbal and non-verbal communication used by the teacher and students during classroom interaction. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The data were taken from an 80-minute video recording of an eleventh-grade English class at MAS Darul Quran. The recording was transcribed and analyzed based on Sinclair and Coulthard's framework, which includes three main levels: Exchange (Informing, Directive, Question–Answer), Move (Initiation, Response, Feedback), and Act (Questioning, Explaining, Agreeing, Refusing, Revising, Appraising). The findings show that the classroom interaction was mainly teacher-centered. The teacher dominated the talk through Initiation moves, mostly in the form of questions, explanations, and instructions, while students gave short and simple responses. Feedback was used less often and mostly as short praise or confirmation. The teacher also used various non-verbal behaviors such as gestures, eye contact, movement, and changes in voice tone to direct attention and motivate students. The results suggest that combining verbal and non-verbal strategies can create a more interactive and engaging classroom atmosphere that supports student participation and understanding.

Keywords: Classroom Interaction; English Language Learning; Nonverbal Communication; Teaching Strategies; Verbal Communication.

1. BACKGROUND

Classroom Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field of applied linguistics that explores how communication takes place during classroom interaction. It focuses on how teachers and students use language to exchange information, organize learning activities, and construct meaning together (Walsh, 2011; Seedhouse, 2004). Since teaching and learning involve not only the transfer of knowledge but also the co-construction of meaning, CDA becomes an important tool to understand classroom communication.

One of the most influential frameworks in CDA is the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model, which analyzes classroom talk through hierarchical units of Exchange, Move, and Act, often represented in the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern. Studies in EFL classrooms have shown that teachers tend to dominate classroom discourse through initiation moves, questioning, and explaining, while students often respond with short and limited answers (Hardman et al., 2003; Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010; Suherdi, 2012; Suryati, 2015). Research in Indonesia has also revealed similar findings, where classroom communication remains teacher-centered, dominated by informing exchanges and directive moves (Fitriani, 2017; Nisa, 2020).

However, most of these studies mainly focus on verbal communication. In reality, nonverbal communication such as gestures, gaze, movement, and facial expressions also plays a vital role in supporting classroom interaction (Mehrabian, 2007; Gower et al., 2005). Nonverbal cues are often used to emphasize meaning, manage classroom discipline, and encourage student participation (Sert, 2017). Despite their importance, there is still limited research that integrates both verbal and nonverbal communication in analyzing classroom discourse.

To address this gap, this study focuses on identifying the types of verbal and nonverbal communication in the 11th grade classroom interaction through the Sinclair and Coulthard model. Therefore, the research problems are formulated as follows: 1. What types of verbal communication are used in the Grade 11 EFL classroom interaction? 2. What types of verbal communication are used in the Grade 11 EFL classroom interaction?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom Discourse Analysis

Classroom discourse analysis can be defined operationally as the study of how language is used in educational settings and how social, cultural, and institutional contexts both shape and are shaped by such use. The term "discourse" refers to "language-in-use", while discourse analysis focuses on the relationship between language and its context. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) view classroom discourse analysis as an attempt to understand the nature of discourse, with possible educational applications. In contrast, Flanders (1970) highlights that discourse analysis is a system for observing classroom interactions.

Sinclair and Coulthard Model

The Sinclair and Coulthard model (1975) is one of the most influential frameworks in the study of classroom discourse. Developed from research on British classrooms, the model describes how teacher–student interaction is structured in a systematic hierarchy. The model consists of five levels: lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act. At the lesson level, the discourse is viewed as a complete unit of teaching. Transactions represent different stages or episodes of classroom activities, while exchanges are smaller units typically consisting of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback. Moves indicate the function of an utterance within the interaction, and acts represent the smallest units, such as asking a question or providing an answer. This framework is widely known for identifying the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern, which highlights how classroom talk often follows a predictable sequence led by the teacher.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is the main form of communication used by humans to convey ideas, information and emotions through spoken and written language. In the context of education, verbal communication is a key instrument for teachers in building effective interactions in the classroom. Hattie et al. (2007) emphasized that verbal communication provides a clear structure in the delivery of messages, allowing for better understanding. Verbal communication also has several functions, namely informative (conveying content), regulatory (regulating class behavior), motivational (encouraging participation), and affective (building good relationships) (Kasim et al., 2022).

Nonverbal Communication

According to Birdwhistell (1970), nonverbal communication is the process of communicating ideas without using written or spoken words by using body language, touch, facial expression, vocal, and spatial distance. For example, positive gestures, like smile or make eye contact, for instance and can foster trust, while negative gestures, like crossing arms might cause stress or misunderstanding. In a teaching context, nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, gestures, or voice modulation help teachers manage attention, signal when it is their turn to speak, and reinforce meaning. Similarly, Ruswandi, Arief, and Novitasari (2024) stated that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia use gestures, eye contact, and movement not only to manage the classroom but also to motivate students and maintain interaction. This shows that nonverbal strategies are not just an addition, but an important part of effective teaching.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a descriptive qualitative design because it aimed to describe how verbal and non-verbal communication appeared naturally in the classroom. According to Sugiyono (2013), descriptive qualitative research is used to study objects in natural situations, with data presented in words rather than numbers. This design was chosen because the data in this study were spoken utterances and visible actions during classroom interaction. The study was conducted in an eleventh-grade English class at MAS Darul Quran. The class was taught by an English teacher and attended by 23 students. The main data source was a video recording documentation of the lesson of 80 minutes, equal to 40 minutes in two sessions. The full lesson was recorded to capture the natural interaction between teacher and students without any instructions or changes to the lesson. Two instruments were used in this study. The first was

the video recording, which provided data on both spoken language and body language. The second was an observation sheet in the form of a table. The table contained columns for the speaker, the utterance or action, and its category based on Sinclair and Coulthard's model:

a. Exchange (Informing, Directive, Question–Answer)

b. Move (Initiation, Response, Feedback)

c. Act (Questioning, Explaining, Agreeing, Refusing, Revising, Appraising)

This format helped the researcher organize and compare the communication patterns in a clear way. The video was first transcribed, including both spoken utterances and important non-verbal actions. Then, each part of the transcript was coded using Sinclair and Coulthard's model at three levels: Exchange, Move, and Act. The data were put into tables to count how often each category appeared. After that, the results were interpreted to explain how the teacher and students used verbal and non-verbal communication in classroom interaction.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Verbal Communication

Table 1. Frequency of Exchanges.

Exchange Type	Frequency	Example
Informing	31	T : *"Okay, now we continue with descriptive text."*
Question and Answer	77	T: *"Okay, what did we learn last week?, about Simple?"*
		S : *"Present"*
		T : *"Okay, what is the purpose of descriptive text?"*
Directive	22	T : *"So, before we start the lesson, please check under your desk. If there is any rubbish or not."*

The frequency analysis shows that Question and Answer exchanges (77) occurred most frequently in the classroom, such as when the teacher asked, "Okay, what did we learn last week?" and students replied simultaneously, "Present" after the teacher's utterance dictated "about Simple" which means the class were having Simple Present Tense discussed. Informing exchanges (31) were also common, for instance when the teacher explained, "Okay, now we continue with descriptive text." Meanwhile, Directive exchanges (22) appeared less often, usually in organizational contexts like, "So, before we start the lesson, please check under your desk. If there is any rubbish or not," or "Okay, before we start our lesson. Please, the leader, lead your friends to pray."

Table 2. Frequency of Move (I-R-F).

Move Type	Frequency	Example
Initiation (I)	68	T : *"Okay, I call the first name is Aisyah."*
Response (R)	51	S : *"Apple miss"*
Feedback (F)	15	T : *"Apple, okay, good"*

At the move level, Initiation (68) dominated the interaction, reflected in repeated teacher questions and prompts, while Responses (51) came from students, often short in form, and Feedback (15) was less frequent, as in the teacher's remarks like, "Okay, your concentration is good."

Table 3. Frequency of Act.

Act Type	Frequency	Example
Questioning	50	T : *"Present berarti kapan waktunya dilakukan?* T : *""What is the function of Simple Present? Ayo, apa tujuan Simple Present? Kapan digunain? Namanya aja udah Simple?"*
Explaining	38	T : *"Nah, today, kita itu belajar descriptive text. Tujuan dari kita belajar decriptive text itu adalah yang pertama, kalian dapat mengumpulkan informasi dari text descriptive."*
Agreeing	17	T : *"Dari Sabang Sampai Marauke? Okay."* S : *"Yes, Lisa"*
Appraising	8	T : *"Okay, thank you for your beautiful voice"* T : *"Okay, thank you give applause."*
Refusing	7	S : *"Nothing miss"*
Revising	1	T : *"Remember ya, this is mammoth. This is different with elephant. "*

Finally, at the act level, the teacher most often used Questioning (50) and Explaining (38), with examples such as, "What is the function of Simple Present? Ayo, apa tujuan Simple Present? Kapan digunain? Namanya aja udah Simple?" and "Nah, today, kita itu belajar descriptive text. Tujuan dari kita belajar decriptive text itu adalah yang pertama, kalian dapat mengumpulkan informasi dari text descriptive." Acts of Agreeing (17) and Appraising (8) appeared in short affirmations like, "Yes, Lisa" or "Okay, thank you give applause." Meanwhile, Refusing (7) and Revising (1) were rare, such as when the teacher corrected students' answers by saying, "Remember ya, this is mammoth. This is different with elephant."

Non Verbal Communication

Table 4. Non Verbal Communication.

Non-Verbal Cue	Function	Example
Gesture /Pointing	Directing attention	Pointing at PowerPoint slides
Eye Contact	Encouraging focus	Looking across the room during questioning
Smiling/Applause	Motivation	- Applauding group presentation
		- Nodding when students were presenting
Movement	Monitoring	Walking among student desks
Voice Modulation	Emphasizing meaning	Raising intonation to stress key points

The nonverbal cues observed in the classroom functioned as effective tools for directing, motivating, and supporting students throughout the lesson, as the teacher used gestures, movement, facial expressions, and variations of tone to manage interaction. These strategies created a warm and engaging atmosphere that encouraged student participation, strengthened students' focus and attention, and ensured that classroom activities proceeded in an orderly and smooth manner.

Discussion

At the exchange level, the result shows that the classroom talk was mostly led by the teacher through Question-and-Answer exchanges. The teacher often asked questions to remind students of facts or check their understanding, such as "What did we learn last week?" These questions helped organize the lesson but gave students little chance to share ideas. This finding supports Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) idea that classroom interaction usually follows an Initiation–Response pattern, where the teacher starts and controls the talk. It also agrees with Harahap and Emzir (2015) and Fitriani (2017), who found that Indonesian EFL classrooms are often teacher-centered. Because the teacher asked most of the questions and gave directions, the communication became clear but less interactive. Similar to Octavia and Zainuddin (2018), this study found that when teachers use many closed or display questions, students tend to give only short answers.

At the move level, Initiation appeared the most, while Response and Feedback happened less often. The teacher began almost every exchange, showing that she had full control of the lesson. Students mostly gave short answers like "Apple, Miss", which showed that they were following but not expanding ideas. This pattern supports Seedhouse's (2004) finding that classroom talk in EFL settings is often short and controlled by teachers. The small number of Feedback moves, such as "Okay" or "Good," shows that the teacher often ended the talk quickly instead of encouraging students to add more. As Nisa (2020) also found, teachers' dominance in giving Initiation and little Feedback limits students' chances to speak freely or share opinions.

At the act level, the teacher used more Questioning and Explaining acts than other types. This means that the teacher focused on asking questions and giving information. Agreeing and Appraising acts, such as "Yes, Lisa" or "Good job," were used to support and motivate students. This supports Walsh's (2011) view that teacher talk shapes students' learning experiences. The teacher also corrected students gently using Refusing or Revising acts, which appeared only a few times. This agrees with Gower et al. (2005), who explain that teachers should give corrections carefully to keep students' confidence. However, because the teacher mostly asked and explained, the classroom interaction focused more on giving knowledge than building two-way discussion.

The non-verbal communication in the classroom also played an important role. The teacher used gestures, eye contact, movement, and voice tone to manage the class and make learning more interesting. For example, she pointed at slides to guide students' attention and smiled or nodded to show encouragement. These findings support Mehrabian (2007), who said that non-verbal behavior carries emotional meaning, and Sert (2017), who showed that gestures and gaze help control interaction. The teacher's non-verbal actions helped create a friendly and active classroom atmosphere, reducing students' anxiety and keeping them engaged (Walsh, 2011; McCarthy, 1991). This shows that effective teaching depends not only on what the teacher says but also on how she uses body language to support learning (Fitriani, 2017; Nisa, 2020; Suryati, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study analyzed Grade 11 EFL classroom interaction by using the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model to study verbal and non-verbal communication. The results show that the classroom is still mostly controlled by the teacher, who often starts the talk through questions, instructions, and explanations. Students usually give short and simple answers, so the interaction remains teacher-centered and less like a real discussion. The feedback stage also happens rarely and is usually just short comments or praise, which limits students' chances to develop their ideas. Besides verbal communication, this study shows that non-verbal communication is also very important in keeping the classroom interaction smooth. The teacher used gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, movement, and voice tone to guide attention, motivate students, and support spoken messages. Combining verbal and non-verbal communication helps create a positive and active learning atmosphere. Teachers are encouraged to mix clear verbal strategies with supportive non-verbal cues to build a more interactive and student-centered classroom.

Suggestion

Based on the findings, several suggestions can be made. First, teachers should use more open-ended questions to give students chances to speak longer and share ideas. Second, teachers are encouraged to provide more elaborative feedback that helps students think and respond in more detail, not only to confirm answers. Third, teachers should continue to use non-verbal communication such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions because these cues help maintain a positive and engaging atmosphere. Finally, future researchers can explore how combining verbal and non-verbal strategies in different classroom settings can improve students' interaction and learning outcomes. In this way, the research findings can make a broader contribution to the development of effective language learning practices.

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