

A cross-linguistic functional analysis of teacher talk in Singapore preschools

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Abstract

The present study sought to assess and characterize teacher talk made by English and Tamil language kindergarten teachers in Singapore preschools. The study employed video-recorded classroom data for analysis, taking classroom observations from five kindergarten 1 and five kindergarten 2 English and Tamil language classes to exemplify data for the learning process. An adapted version of the Functional Language Alternation Analysis of Teacher Talk (FLAATT, Kim 2001; Kim and Elder 2005) scheme was used to analyze and perform a cross-linguistic comparison of the relationship between teachers' language choices in the two language classrooms and particular pedagogic functions (e.g. animating, translating, explaining, creating, prompting, dialoguing). Findings indicate that the participating teachers differed from one another not only in the amount of target language used but also in the pedagogic functions they used most frequently and the language (English or Tamil) that they chose for these functions. The results suggest that the frequently occurring pedagogic functions in each teacher's extracts were varied, and further scrutiny of the functions revealed that most of them do not involve much linguistic elaboration. There was a tendency by most teachers (in most Tamil classrooms) to avoid complex interactions in the Tamil language moreso than in English classrooms, limiting the potential for intake and for real communication on the part of the children. 'Animating and 'prompting' in particular, were found in all the teacher's narratives and in most cases, ranked in the most frequent functions. Implications are drawn for research and for teacher education.

Keywords: Functional analysis, Teacher Talk, Dialoguing, Translating