The Role of Teacher Talk Adjustment in EFL Classrooms in
Japanese Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine how teachers adjust their speech to interact in English
with elementary school students in classrooms. Participants are four teachers involved in 5th and 6th
grade Foreign Language Activities. Comparative analysis of the effect of teachers’ language use
(English and Japanese vs. almost all English) on linguistic complexity and the usage of interational
adjustment in teacher talk obtained the following three main results: The teachers who conducted the
lessons almost all in English (1) adjusted their speech to make them shorter and less complex, (2)
employed a larger amount and wider variety of interactional adjustment in terms of repetitions,
comprehension checks and supportive gestures, and (3) elicited oral responses from students and
facilitated student-teacher interaction by employing student-repetitions, translation of students’
Japanese utterances, and display questions. This study also incidentally found that the teachers who
avoided Japanese use were relatively reliant on students’ Japanese use but encouraged the students to
use English by showing their own positive attitude towards communication in English.

1. Introduction

Compulsory English lessons on a weekly basis for 5th and 6th graders commenced at
elementary schools (ESs) all over Japan in April 2011. The overall objective of the lessons, Foreign
Language Activities, is fostering communication abilities through foreign languages and homeroom
teachers (HRTs) are encouraged to take the initiative. The Ministry of Education, Sports, Science,
and Technology started distributing teaching materials, English Note, to schools in 2009.

Since the general frameworks were established, support for teachers to improve pedagogical
skills has been an urgent issue. According to questionnaire surveys, Japanese ES teachers have less
confidence in their English (L2) proficiency, compared to those in Taiwan and Korea (Butler: 2004;
Watanabe, 2009). The lack of confidence is reflected in their language use in classrooms. Another
survey shows only 4.5% of HRTs responded “almost all L2” to the question “What is the maximum
extent of L2 use in Foreign Language Activities classrooms?” The answer “basically in Japanese
(L1)” amounted to 68.8% (Benesse, 2009). On the other hand, Matsuzaki (2011) reports that 5th and
6th graders felt most frustrated when they did not understand what their teachers were saying in the
L2 in English lessons. Teachers are required to adjust their L2 speech to make it comprehensible, especially when the students have only limited L2 proficiency. Nevertheless, few studies on teachers' speech performance based on actual data in ES English lessons have been done in Japan. To my knowledge, research available is limited to listing strategies of interactional adjustment (Inaoka, 2004; Inaoka & Shimizu, 2003), analysis of linguistic and lexical complexity (Eguchi, 2010), and exploring instruction types including language use (Yukawa, 2002).

The present study aims to clarify how teachers adjust their speech to interact in L2 with ES students in classrooms where lessons full of lively interactions are expected. The comparative analysis of the effect of teachers’ language use (L2 and L1 vs. almost all L2) initially focuses on the linguistic complexity in teacher talk, then, the usage of interactional adjustment is investigated. The outcomes could present a source of promising suggestions to ES teachers who hesitate to use the L2 and encourage them to interact in the L2 with students.

2. Review of related literature

2.1 Teacher talk to low proficiency L2 learners

In foreign and second language classrooms, teachers face a common difficulty that their target language (TL) speech should be comprehensible to students. Especially for limited language proficiency students, teachers are required to adjust in various ways in interaction.

Wong-Fillmore (1985) identified facilitative features of teacher talk for young learner L2 acquisition through longitudinal classroom observation. That is, a clear language separation and avoidance of translation, an emphasis on communication, grammaticality, patterns and routines, repetitions, tailoring questions, and language richness and playfulness. Tardif (1994) also analyzed longitudinal data in early immersion classrooms and suggested strategies to construct L2 lessons as follows: self-repetition, modeling, and paraphrasing of student L1 utterances in L2, paying more attention to meaning than to linguistic form, and creating context to make the L2 meaningful through support by visual aids or non-verbal cues. Chaudron (1988) reviewed numerous studies on teacher talk to low proficiency L2 learners and the following features were recognized: slower rate of speech, more frequent pauses and self-repetition, exaggerated pronunciation, more basic vocabulary use, lower degree of subordination, greater use of declaratives and statements than questions.

Experimental data also presents the characteristics of teacher talk to low proficiency L2 learners. Henzl (1973, 1979) carried out experiments where teachers of native speakers (NSs) told a story to adult EFL learners to examine changes in their speech complexity. Consequently, noticeable differences in complexity depending on listeners’ L2 proficiency were found. The mean length of speech was 19.0, 10.1 and 5.8 words per sentences for NNs, advanced non-native speakers (NNSs) and beginners respectively. In addition, fewer subordinate clauses were used by those with lesser competence. Penate and Boylan (2005) also conducted a storytelling experiment to investigate the experienced teacher’s usage of interactional adjustment in three areas: repetitions, comprehension...
checks and supportive gestures, to EFL primary and secondary school students. The results showed that all the strategies were employed to primary students to a greater extent than those to secondary students. Moreover, repetitions of student speech, display questions and unfinished sentences were not employed with secondary students but only with primary students.

2.2 The effectiveness of interactional adjustment

Adjustment in teacher talk has two major categories while the terms are used in slightly different ways depending on researchers. One category is linguistic adjustment and the other is interactional adjustment (Cabrera & Martinez, 2001; Chaudron, 1988; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Lynch, 1996; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Penate & Boylan, 2005). Linguistic adjustment can be subcategorized into three areas: phonology, syntax, and vocabulary, and a number of studies have illustrated the effectiveness of linguistic adjustment, (eg., Cervantes & Gainer, 1992).

The focus of research on low proficiency L2 learners, however, tends to pay more attention to interactional adjustment effects. The storytelling experiment by Penate and Boylan (2005), mentioned earlier, verified that interactional adjustment contributed significantly to listener comprehension. Cabrera and Martinez (2001) also conducted a storytelling experiment with EFL Spanish primary school children simplified under two different conditions: linguistic adjustments, and linguistic and interactional adjustments. The results showed that only the second condition enabled subjects to follow the thread of the story told by the teacher. Similarly, an experiment with ESL low-intermediate adult learners by Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) obtained the results that interactional modification is a significantly greater factor to facilitate comprehension than linguistic modification. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) assert that interactional, not input, adjustment is more important for learning, citing the fact that children do not learn an L2 by watching large amounts of L2 TV programs. Their illustration implies that quality of input, not only the amount of input, affects learning results and interactional adjustment is essential to enhance comprehensibility.

In teacher talk, repetitions provide an opportunity to encounter oral information once again. Self-repetition has a possibility to facilitate learner comprehension and other-repetition facilitates teacher-learner interaction (Urano, 1998). Comprehension checks stimulate learner attention and participation in interaction as well as examining the success of learners’ comprehension. Teacher questions link to the instructional goals (McCormick & Donate, 2000) and provide learner output (Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, the significance of nonlinguistic cues to children is widely recognized. Researchers claim the effectiveness of supportive gestures (eg., Kellerman, 1992), and visual aids such as pictures and actual objects (eg., Pinter, 2006; Richard & Rodgers, 2001).

2.3 The argument on L1 use

In an EFL context, to provide students with as many comprehensible language samples as possible, teachers need to take responsibility for making maximum use of TL in classrooms. On the other hand, the limited use of L1 in classrooms is supported by researchers. For example, Atkinson
(1987) states that L1 could support teacher-learner psychological relations as well as making classroom management efficient, and argues that the ratio of profitable L1 use at an early stage is about 5% to about 95% of the TL. Cook (2001) suggests maximizing TL use without avoiding the L1 in such areas as grammatical explanation and disciplinary speech although he admits that teacher L1 use has an undesirable influence on learner motivation towards communication in the TL.

However, L1 use, such as translating self-utterances in the TL into the L1 or the reverse, merely for an instant solution to difficulties in interaction, has the possibility that learners simply stop listening to the TL and that it will prevent learners from using the TL as a tool of communication and TL acquisition (eg., Atkinson, 1987; Butler, 2005). Polio and Duff (1994), and Turnbull (2001) point out that there is a variety in the ratio of teacher L1 use in classrooms. Based on both the theoretical rationale of learner development and his empirical evidence on learner motivation in EFL contexts, Turnbull highlights some pitfalls of relying too extensively on the L1 and the importance of maximum use of the TL in the classrooms. Regarding learner motivation, Zilm (1989) discovered that an increase in her TL use in the classroom contributed to her students using proportionally more TL (cited in Nunan, 1995). Wong-Fillmore (1985) found, through longitudinal studies, that student TL acquisition developed without difficulty when teachers made an effort to avoid translation and tried to communicate in the TL with their students. Similarly, Chaudron (1988) emphasizes that the teacher should provide a rich TL environment, not only through instruction and drills but also disciplinary and management operations. Concerning English lessons in Japanese ESs, Eguchi (2010) reported that teachers’ L2 speech was exceedingly less complex linguistically than that which appeared in teachers’ manuals and there might be the possibility of a relationship to teachers’ language choices and the usage of interactional adjustment.

Considering current circumstances and the existing literature on teacher talk, specific statistics and exemplification obtained through research in actual classrooms could contribute to pedagogical and motivational development for ES teachers. The research questions (RQs) of the present study are as follows:

RQ1: Does teachers’ L1 use have any influence on their linguistic complexity in L2?
RQ2: How much do teachers employ interactional adjustment in terms of repetitions, comprehension checks and supportive gestures to conduct English lessons?
RQ3: Are there any differences in the usage of interactional adjustment between the teachers depending on their L1 use? If yes, what are they?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Four teachers of Foreign Language Activities participated in this study. The focus was lessons conducted by each participant while team-teaching with a support teacher (ST) at public ESs
in Aichi. None of the schools were in a special situation such as a Designated Pilot School or being given a special subsidy for research. Although possessing sufficient L2 proficiency, two participants (Teacher A and B) used both L1 and L2 as a communication tool with the students and the others (Teacher C and D) interacted almost totally in L2 with the students in each lesson. Table 1 shows the profiles of the four participants and the outline of the target lessons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>JTE</td>
<td>JTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of ST</td>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>HRT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade of students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of students</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching material</td>
<td>English Note 2 Lesson 4</td>
<td>English Note 1 Lesson 4</td>
<td>English Note 1 Lesson 7</td>
<td>English Note 1 Lesson 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 proficiency</td>
<td>STEP pre-1st</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>STEP pre-1st</td>
<td>STEP pre-1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>14 years at Jr. High</td>
<td>3 years to adults</td>
<td>6.5 years at ES</td>
<td>7.5 years at ES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: JTEs are Japanese teachers of English who are part-time employees. Jr. High = junior high school.*

### 3.2 Data Collection

Four target lessons were video-recorded. All of them were basically grounded on the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) method (Harmer, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001) which designated a specific phrase or a dialogue featured in *English Note* as the goal of communication in each lesson. Three lessons by Teacher A, C and D lasted 45 minutes respectively and the other lesson by Teacher B lasted 41 minutes. The author transcribed all the utterances produced by the teachers and students in each lesson. The utterances which were not shared with the whole class were excluded because this study focuses on how teachers adjust their speech to the class as a whole.

### 3.3 Analysis of language use and linguistic complexity

The definition for an utterance unit (UU) by Crookes and Rulon (1985) was applied for the transcription. Namely, that an utterance is defined as a stream of speech with at least one of the following characteristics: (1) under one intonation contour, (2) bounded by pauses, and (3) constituting a single semantic unit (cited in Crookes, 1990). The present study, however, excluded (3) to investigate the linguistic complexity of utterances punctuated with periods, interrogation marks or exclamation marks. Regarding pauses (2), a pause was defined as 1 second or more to make the analysis consistent although Crookes and Rulon (1985) do not mention a specific time.

To work out the ratio of UUs in the L1 or L2 to total UUs, the number of UUs produced in the
L1 or L2 by each participant is calculated. Regarding linguistic complexity of speech, the present study adopts two index points for measurement. One is the length of L2 UUs which is calculated by how many words each L2 UU consists of. The other is syntactic complexity of L2 UUs which are classified into five categories: a word, a phrase, a simple sentence, a compound sentence and a complex sentence. The ratio of each form to total UUs is computed.

3.4 Analysis of interactional adjustment

3.4.1 Repetitions
Repetition is generally defined as any utterance that replicates the preceding utterance. To make the analysis more exact and consistent, referring to Penate and Boylan (2005), and Urano (1998), this study elaborates the definition. Namely, repetitions are what have been said in one of the three UUs that preceded the repetition. Self-repetitions are utterances where teachers replicate their own preceding ones. Other-repetitions are where teachers replicate the other teacher (T2) or students’ preceding ones. However, utterances such as ‘Okay.’, ‘All right.’ or those for mechanical drilled practices are excluded because these repetitions do not have the original function mentioned earlier.

Also, all the L2 repetitions are classified as one of the three categories delineated by Urano (1998). Namely, an exact repetition of a preceding utterance, an expansion which is a repetition of a preceding utterance with the addition of some items or part of an utterance, and a paraphrase which is a reformulation or elaboration of an utterance without changing the main proposition.

L1 translations in self-repetitions are classified into three types. That is, self-translations of the preceding own L1 utterances into the L2, self-translations of the preceding own L2 utterances into the L1, and self-repetitions of the preceding own L1 utterances in the L1. In general, these repetitions are excluded from studies on interactional adjustment because ‘adjustment’ arises when a speaker tries to interact in the L2 or in the TL with an interlocutor. It is, however, analyzed because the comparison of the strategy between whether or not L1 is used is a key issue in this study. Another type of L1 translation, translating student L1 utterances into the L2, is also analyzed, which can be seen as an efficient strategy to develop students’ L2, differing from the former types of translations.

3.4.2 Comprehension checks
Comprehension checks can be subcategorized into four types: questions to check whether or not students are following (checks of students’ conditions), display questions, referential questions, and unfinished sentences (Penate & Boylan, 2005). Checks of students’ conditions are exemplified as ‘Okay?’ ‘All right?’ ‘Are you ready?’ Display questions are questions whose answers the teacher already knows. In contrast, referential questions are questions whose precise answers are not known by the teacher although he/she has a clear idea of how the students will answer (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Unfinished sentences are sentences that are not completed but used as a means of checking student comprehension or facilitating their oral output. In addition to the number of these four types of questions, this study analyzes the ratio of the utterances asked by each teacher out of total UUs.
3.4.3 Supportive gestures

Talking with gestures which act as aids to make oral text comprehensible relates to this investigation. Visual aids such as pictures, photos and realia also facilitate student comprehension and are often listed as representative interactional adjustments (e.g., Inaoka, 2004). In this study, however, visual aids without being accompanied by teacher utterances are excluded because this study aims to confirm the role of adjustment of teacher talk. Utterances accompanied by pointing to or showing visual aids are numbered as supportive gestures. The classification lists of gestures which were described by Penate and Boylan (2005) are used as reference points. The number and the ratio of UUs which are accompanied by supportive gestures to the total UUs are calculated.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Language use and linguistic complexity

Table 2 presents the number of UUs in L1 and L2 produced by each teacher as well as the ratio to total UUs. L1 use by Teacher A and B was 30.8% and 24.9% respectively. In contrast, L1 use by Teacher C and D was 3.7% and 0.2% respectively. That means Teacher A and B rely not only on the L2 but also L1 as a communication tool although Teacher C and D used almost all L2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>B (%)</th>
<th>C (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 presents the length of L2 UUs produced by each teacher. The mean length of L2 UUs of Teacher A, B, C and D was 2.70 words, 3.95 words, 2.30 words and 2.28 words per UU respectively. The ratio of the UUs which were three or less than three to total UUs amounted to 82.5%, 84.5% and 85.1% for Teacher A, C and D respectively. That means most of the L2 speech of Teacher A, C and D involved using two or three words per UU to give their students statements, instructions, questions, and feedback to their responses or behavior, although the ratio for Teacher B was 50.7%. In the meanwhile, longer UUs with over ten words by Teacher A (5UUs) and B (11UUs) were observed although neither Teacher C nor D produced such longer utterances.

Table 4 presents the syntactic complexity of the L2 utterances produced by each teacher. All the teachers used simple sentences more frequently than any other forms, which accounted for 51.3%, 56.5%, 40.4% and 51.8% of the total utterances by Teacher A, B, C and D respectively. The second most frequently used form by all the teachers was one word utterances, then, phrases followed. The sum of one word utterances and phrases produced by Teacher A, B, C and D was
43.7%, 33.1%, 59.1% and 47.8% to total UUs. However, regarding compound and complex sentences, a clear discrepancy can be observed between teachers, depending on the extent of their L1 use. Teacher A and B used compound and complex sentences on aggregate 5.0% and 10.3% respectively. This figure is relatively higher than the usage of Teacher C and D (0.5% and 0.4% respectively).

Table 4 Syntactic complexity of L2 utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple sentence</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound sentence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex sentence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ1 asked whether teachers’ L1 use had an influence on their L2 linguistic complexity. The answer is yes. Teachers who used both L1 and L2 had a tendency to make their utterances longer and more complex. In order to confirm the influence of L1 use more specifically, qualitative examination can develop the quantitative analysis results through focusing on the longer and complex L2 utterances provided by Teacher A and B.

Teacher A and B both produced 15 longer and more complex sentences. The following excerpts are typical and frequent occurrences of L2 complex sentence use accompanied by L1 use.

UU118 Teacher A: Hai, jaa konoaida yattakoto wo fukashu shimasho.
UU119 Teacher A: Oboeteirukona?
UU120 Teacher A: Do you remember what you did last time?
UU121 Teacher A: Last time, we studied ‘I can’.
UU122 Teacher A: Okay? (Excerpt 1)

UU32 Teacher B: So I want you to draw a picture of what you like.
UU33 Teacher B: Okay?
UU34 Teacher B: I want you to draw a picture of what you like.
(UU35-UU43 Teacher B continued to explain what she wanted the students to do in the L2.)
UU44 Teacher B: Sukina mono no e wo mitsu kaite kudasai. (Excerpt 2)

A number of previous studies claim that both subordinate clauses and the past tense tend to be less used for low proficiency L2 learners (eg., Chaudron, 1988; Lynch, 1996). UU118, UU119 in Excerpt
1, however, provided the same meaning in L1 just before UU120 with the complex sentence. The students, therefore, did not need to comprehend UU120, which might not be necessary information. On the other hand, In Excerpt 2, Teacher B provided UU32 and UU34 which were long and complex sentences. After repeating the explanation of what she wanted the students to do, she finally translated her own L2 utterances into the L1 because the students did not seem to comprehend what she said in the L2. Further qualitative examination confirmed that teacher L1 use has the possibility of leading to more complex L2 utterances, and vice versa.

4.2 Interactional adjustment
4.2.1 Repetitions

Table 5 shows the number of self-repetitions and other-repetitions as well as the ratio of self-repetitions out of total UUs employed by each teacher. All of them utilized self-repetitions and there was no clear distinction between those who did or did not use L1, with a range from 12.6% to 24.1%, although the usage by Teacher B was noticeably lower because of the small number of her L2 utterances. However, a conspicuous difference was found in the usage of other-repetitions between teachers, depending on their L1 use. Teacher C and D frequently employed student-repetitions (16 and 12 UUs respectively) compared to Teacher A and B (2 UUs each).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-repetitions</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-repetitions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlocutor of other-repetitions (n)</td>
<td>Student- T2-</td>
<td>Student- T2-</td>
<td>Student- T2-</td>
<td>Student- T2-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of UUs involving L1 translations provided by each teacher is shown in Table 6. A clear boundary between the teachers who used L1 or did not to interact with their students was observed. Self-repetitions related to L1 by Teacher A and B were 40 and 15 UUs respectively. Considering their L2 self-repetitions (67 and 30 UUs respectively), their L1 translations accounted for 50% or more of the number of their L2 self-repetitions. It means that code-switching was done frequently. In contrast, Teacher C did not translate at all and Teacher D translated a L2 word into the L1 only once. Another notable point was the usage of other-translations which were only seen in the case of Teacher C and D. The usage of exact-repetitions, expansion and paraphrase by each teacher are shown in Table 7. Concerning exact-repetitions and expansion, distinct features cannot be discovered between the teachers in the ratio. Paraphrase, however, was more frequently employed by Teacher C and D, both quantitatively and in percentage terms, compared to Teacher A and B.
RQ2 asked how much each teacher employed interactional adjustment. The figures in Table 5, 6 and 7 answered it in respect of repetitions. RQ3 asked whether there are differences in the usage of interactional adjustment between the teachers depending on their L1 use. Concerning repetitions, the answer is yes. To clarify the differences more specifically, qualitative examination is developed.

The most conspicuous discrepancy between the teachers depending on their L1 use was the usage of other-repetitions, especially student-repetitions, which were frequently employed by Teacher C and D. The usage of paraphrases was also slightly higher in the case of Teacher C and D in both percentage terms and numbers. It is conceivable that Teacher C and D attempted to paraphrase as a strategy to aid student L2 comprehension instead of L1 use and enhance student-teacher interaction in the L2. UU12 in Excerpt 3 is an example of student-repetitions which were often observed with Teacher C and D. It is also categorized as paraphrasing in the present study. This example signifies that Teacher C and D tried to enhance L2 teacher-student interaction and carried out Initiation-Response-Follow-up (IRF) exchange which is one kind of typical teacher-student interaction (Sinclair &Brazil, 1982).

UU11 **Teacher C:** How are you? [Pointing to a student]  
**Student I:** I’m sleepy.

UU12 **Teacher C:** You are sleepy. [Expressing a sleepy look]  (Excerpt 3)

Another distinctive feature of the usage of repetitions frequently observed in Teacher C and D was translating student L1 utterances into L2 without forcing them not to use their L1. UU318 is one of the examples of student-repetitions and student-translations. Teacher C asked a question (UU317) and a student answered it in the L1. Then, she provided negative feedback (UU318).

UU314 **Teacher C:** What’s this? [Showing only the shape of a picture]
UU315 **Teacher C:** In English? [Gesturing turning over with both hands]
UU316 **Teacher C:** All right?
UU317 **Teacher C:** What’s this? [Showing only the shape of the picture]  
**Student I:** Wakatta.
**Student I:** It’s noto.

UU318 **Teacher C:** It’s a notebook.  (Excerpt 4)
This implicit way of negative feedback, in the sense of not being accompanied by explicit expressions such as ‘You should say’, is classified as ‘recasts’ (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Long (1996) stressed the facilitative role of recasts in conversational interaction in ESL contexts and Ohta (2000) found that students noticed recasts even when directed to another student or to the whole class in an EFL context. Slattery and Willis (2001) used the term recasts for the meaning of translating a learner’s L1 utterance into the L2 and emphasized their importance especially to young learners.

Concerning the teacher feedback to students’ L1 utterances, an additional finding arose. Teacher C often encouraged student L1 use explicitly such as ‘Japanese is okay.’ when the answer in the L2 did not seem to be familiar while she exhorted them to speak in L2 for a familiar word. As a result, her exhortation smoothly led to students’ L2 utterances. Teacher D was also willing to answer students’ L1 questions with simple words in the L2 (Excerpt 5).

UU111  Teacher D: Talk to three friends. [Showing three with her fingers]
UU112  Teacher D: And go back to your seat. [Pointing to a chair]
Student 1: Sōmin aisatsu shite kara suwaru?
UU113  Teacher D: Yes.  (Excerpt 5)

Furthermore, both Teacher C and D never directed the students not to speak in their L1. In contrast, Teacher A and B occasionally directed the students to use the L2 rather than the L1. This finding implies that the teachers who avoided L1 use had a tendency to be lenient towards students’ L1 use. They encouraged their students to use the L2 through showing their own attitude toward L2 use instead of as a prescriptive instruction.

### 4.2.2 Comprehension checks

Table 8 presents the number of each comprehension check strategy and their ratio out of all UUs. Teacher A, B, C and D utilized comprehension checks 42 (12.3%), 21 (13.6%), 111 (15.9%), and 97 times (20.5%) on aggregate. All the teachers employed checks of the students’ condition exemplified as ‘Okay?’ or ‘Are you ready? more frequently (29, 13, 65 and 40 UUs respectively) than any other types of comprehension checks. Teacher A, B and D employed referential questions the second most frequently and Teacher C employed display questions more frequently (30 UUs) than referential questions (12 UUs). Regarding display questions, only Teacher C and D employed them (30 and 21 UUs respectively). Neither Teacher A nor B asked display questions at all. Teacher D used a larger number of referential questions compared to the other teachers. Unfinished sentences were employed by Teacher A, C and D although the number was not large.

The figures in Table 8 answered RQ2 in respect of comprehension checks by each teacher. RQ3 asked whether there are differences in the usage of interactional adjustment between the teachers depending on their L1 use. Concerning comprehension checks, the answer is yes. For the confirmation of their role, more elaborate examination is required focusing on discrepancies.
The most striking difference was the usage of display questions which were asked by only Teacher C and D. Neither A nor B asked them at all despite the two teachers asking referential questions nearly as frequently as Teacher C. Display questions are often criticized in the domain of communicative language teaching because of the disadvantage that they are unlikely to generate authentic settings for communication compared to referential questions (e.g., Long & Sato, 1983). Through qualitative examination, however, a number of display questions were recognized which triggered student participation in L2 interaction. For example, when Teacher D initiated a new topic, she asked display questions which could be answered by any students in the classroom such as “Who’s this?” or “What’s her name?” while showing pictures of Suzuki Ichiro or Asada Mao. Many of the students answered the questions with self-confidence in chorus. Another example (Excerpt 6) illustrates that a display question (UU200) generated negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996) indicating another type of typical teacher-student interaction.

UU200 Teacher D: What’s this? [Taking out a ruler from a bag]

Student 1: Rora?

UU201 Teacher D: Close. [Expressing ‘close’ with fingers]

UU202 Teacher D: Close. [Expressing ‘close’ with fingers]

UU203 Teacher D: Close. [Expressing ‘close’ with fingers]

Student 1: Ruler.

UU204 Teacher D: Ruler. [Showing the ruler]

UU205 Teacher D: Yes.

UU206 Teacher D: It’s a ruler. [Putting a picture of a ruler on the blackboard] (Excerpt 6)

Not only the usage of referential questions, but also the usage of display questions allowed student oral responses to be elicited and triggered interaction. Likewise unfinished sentences, utilized except for Teacher B, enabled to scaffold students’ oral responses and facilitated teacher-student interaction.

4.2.3 Supportive gestures

Table 9 presents the number of UUs which were accompanied by supportive gestures and the
ratio to total UUs. These strategies were utilized by all the teachers and accounted for 45.2% to 63.8% of total utterance units. However, the usage of Teacher C and D (443 UUs, 63.4% and 302 UUs, 63.8%) was comparatively higher than Teacher A and B (157 UUs, 45.2% and 78 UUs, 50.6%). These figures answered RQ2 in respect of the remaining part, supportive gestures.

| Table 9  Number and ratio of supportive gestures |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Teacher  | A      | B      | C      | D      |
|          | n (%)  | n (%)  | n (%)  | n (%)  |
| Supportive gestures | 157 | 45.2 | 78 | 50.6 | 443 | 63.4 | 302 | 63.8 |

To answer RQ3, in respect of supportive gestures, each whole video-recorded lesson was carefully observed focusing on the types of gestures utilized by the teachers. As a result, ten types of gestures were recognized as follows: personal identification, place, affirmative or negative, appearance, actions, orders, feelings, greetings, numbers, and visual aids. Types and purposes of gestures, however, partly differed depending on the teachers’ L1 use. Teacher A hardly utilized them for ‘appearance’ or ‘feeling’ in spite of his frequent use for ‘personal identification’, ‘place’, ‘affirmative or negative’ and ‘visual aids’. Also, ‘actions’ had not been used in the first half of the lesson until he told the students to use gestures in the interview game. Similarly, Teacher B employed limited types of gestures. In contrast, Teacher C and D utilized supportive gestures almost all the time during their classes. The types of gestures, moreover, were often combined. For example, the utterance “You will get six cards” produced by Teacher D accompanied three types of gestures: ‘personal identification’ by pointing to the students, ‘numbers’ by showing six with her fingers and ‘visual aids’ by showing six picture cards. Thus, the teachers who did not rely on L1 use used a wider variety of gestures to provide aids for the students to infer what was being said.

5 Conclusion

This study has investigated how the teachers adjusted their speech to interact in the L2 with their students in ES classrooms. Although the number of participants is too limited to confidently generalize the results, the evidence gained by comparative analysis of the effect of the teachers’ language use obtained the following three main characteristics for teacher talk.

Firstly, the teachers adjusted their utterances to be shorter and less complex in L2 interaction with ES students at an early stage of learning. Approximately 85% of UUs were three or fewer than three words per UUs, and 95% were a word, a phrase or a single sentence. The use of longer and complex utterances was prone to cause L1 use. Secondly, they employed a larger amount and wider variety of interactional adjustment, whether repetitions, comprehension checks or supportive gestures. That can be expected to facilitate student comprehension of spoken text. Thirdly, they made effective use of students’ utterances. The usage of student-repetitions, and especially translating
student L1 utterances into English, or display questions which were answerable by any student, enabled them to elicit student oral responses and generate interaction. This study also incidentally found that the teachers who did not rely on L1 were relatively reliant on student L1 use and encouraged L2 use by showing their own positive attitude toward communication in L2 instead of through prescriptive instruction.

In Japan, while the notion of classroom English is well-known, understanding of teacher talk is less developed (Izumi, 2009), despite literature showing its effectiveness for EFL learners in their early stages. The results of this study contribute to our understanding of the role of teacher talk and encourage ES teachers to attempt a maximum use of L2 in their classrooms with the aid of a large amount and wide variety of interactional adjustment.

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Note

1 They include three participants in Eguchi (2010) which yielded further questions and motivated the present study. Therefore, a portion of the statistics concerning the linguistic analysis of the teachers’ utterances in the previous study are partly involved in Table 2, 3 and 4 in the present study.

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