Formulaic Sequence Uses of Non-native and Native English Teacher Talks

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Kwon, Ye-Eun. 2012. Formulaic Sequence Uses of Non-native and Native English Teacher Talks. The Journal of Studies in Language 28.1, 1-27. This study investigated differences and similarities in formulaic sequence uses between non-native English teachers (NNTs) and native English teachers (NTs). The data were collected by recording lectures of four teachers. The formulaic patterns of the data were visualized by extracting four word formulaic sequences using Collocate 1.0 and functionally analyzing them. In addition, formulaic sequences from teacher talks were compared with textbook scripts to see whether the textbooks influenced the expressions used in teacher talks. The raw frequency of formulaic sequences in NNT talk was more than twice that of NTs. However, trimming down formulaic sequences altered the raw results, so that NTs showed a higher rate of frequency of formulaic sequence use. Functional analysis of formulaic sequences demonstrated that both groups predominantly used referential and stance expressions, which was a reflection of classroom discourse. Topics from textbooks affected formulaic sequence use and produced differences between NNTs and NTs, where NNTs employed more formulaic sequences from the textbooks. (Ewha Woman’s Univ.)

Key words: formulaic sequence, non-native teacher talk, learner corpus, TETF class, functional analysis

1. Introduction

English has been a mandatory course for all school levels in Korea, and yet English education has not produced effective results with respect to communicative competence; that is, how to use English for communication. Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Korea (MOE) attempted to make changes in the English curriculum based on the Communicative Language Teaching when establishing the Seventh national curriculum from elementary schools to universities (MOE, 1997). To implement communicative language teaching in classroom, the MOE
encouraged English teachers to teach classes in the target language. Consequently, Teaching English Through English (TETE) has become a requirement for English teachers in Korea across all the levels.

Teachers as well as students seem to appreciate the values of TETE, but the implementation of TETE often faces many obstacles, such as teachers' lack of oral proficiency, different proficiency levels of the students in a class, and pressure due to preparing for tests such as regular exams at school and entrance exams for high school or college. Previous studies showed that many non-native English teachers realize the importance of using the target language but often express difficulties in implementing TETE because of their own lack of oral proficiency (Butler, 2004; Kim, 2002, 2008; Lee, 2006). English teachers expressed their needs for improving their oral proficiency specifically for classroom teaching (Min, 2008).

Classroom teaching takes place in a repeated situation where language has a number of typical routines. Teacher talk, or the type of language used by a teacher in the classroom, can be defined as a register (Johnstone, 2002). Johnstone mentioned that understanding some features of a register could lead to better communication. Therefore, teacher talk should be fully understood in order to provide novice language teachers with practical tips for classroom language use. However, previous research (Li, 1998; Butler, 2004; Min, 2008) on teacher talk has focused on teachers' perceptions by surveying and interviewing mostly primary or secondary school teachers. Not much research has been conducted based on authentic data from classrooms.

The aim of the present study is to understand features in teacher talk used by native (NT) and non-native (NNT) teachers, focusing on formulaic sequences. Formulaic sequences refer to phrases or collocations that language users use as chunks; these typically occupy about sixty percent of spoken language (Erman & Warren, 2000) and have been proved to improve fluency in L2 learners (Wood, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of formulaic sequences