

## Speech Function of Classroom Interaction in Expository and Persuasive Writing

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### ABSTRAK

Interaksi di kelas memainkan peran penting dalam pengajaran menulis Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), khususnya dalam penulisan ekspositori dan persuasif, di mana siswa dituntut untuk mengembangkan argumen, mengatur ide secara logis, dan menegosiasikan makna melalui penggunaan bahasa. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fungsi ujaran yang digunakan dalam interaksi di kelas dan untuk memeriksa peran interaksional dosen dan siswa selama pengajaran penulisan ekspositori dan persuasif. Data dikumpulkan dari interaksi kelas yang terjadi secara alami melalui rekaman audio dosen dan siswa di kelas menulis. Interaksi yang direkam ditranskripsikan secara verbatim dan dianalisis menggunakan kategori fungsi ujaran yang berasal dari Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik, termasuk pernyataan, pertanyaan, perintah, dan tawaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa interaksi di kelas didominasi oleh dosen, dengan pernyataan, pertanyaan, dan perintah yang paling sering muncul, sementara partisipasi siswa sebagian besar terbatas pada respons singkat. Fungsi ujaran dan tawaran yang diprakarsai siswa jarang muncul, menunjukkan peluang terbatas untuk negosiasi makna secara kolaboratif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun fungsi penyampaian materi yang didominasi oleh dosen mendukung kejelasan pengajaran dalam kelas menulis, peningkatan kesempatan untuk interaksi yang diprakarsai oleh siswa diperlukan untuk mendorong pengajaran penulisan ekspositori dan persuasif yang lebih interaktif dan efektif.

**Kata kunci:** Interaksi di kelas; fungsi bicara; EFL; penulisan ekspositori-persuasif

### ABSTRACT

*Classroom interaction plays an important role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction, particularly in expository and persuasive writing, where students are required to develop arguments, organize ideas logically, and negotiate meaning through language use. This study aims to analyze speech functions employed in classroom interaction and to examine the interactional roles of lecturers and students during expository and persuasive writing instruction. The data were collected from naturally occurring classroom interaction through audio recordings of lecturers and students in writing classes. The recorded interaction was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using speech function categories derived from Systemic Functional Linguistics, including statements, questions, commands, and offers. The findings indicate that classroom interaction was predominantly lecturer-centered, with statements, questions, and commands occurring most frequently, while student participation was largely limited to brief responses. Student-initiated speech functions and offers appeared infrequently, suggesting limited opportunities for collaborative negotiation of meaning. The study concludes that although lecturer-dominated speech functions support instructional clarity in writing classes, increasing opportunities for student-initiated interaction is necessary to foster more interactive and effective expository and persuasive writing instruction.*

**Keyword:** classroom interaction; speech functions; EFL; expository-persuasive writing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the small class size, classroom interaction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction does not always function interactively. In expository and persuasive writing classes, students are expected to actively express ideas, ask questions, and negotiate meaning in order to develop arguments and critical reasoning skills. However, based on classroom experience, even in a class consisting of only three students, interaction often remains lecturer-led, with students showing limited initiation of talk and minimal engagement beyond responding to questions or instructions. This condition indicates that class size alone does not guarantee interactive learning, particularly in academic writing instruction.

In EFL writing classrooms, interaction plays a crucial role in supporting students' development of ideas, organization of arguments, and understanding of genre conventions. Expository and persuasive writing require students to evaluate information, construct logical reasoning, and articulate viewpoints clearly, all of which rely heavily on effective classroom interaction (Hyland, 2019; Sun & Zhang, 2022). When interaction is limited, students may struggle to develop confidence, critical thinking, and independence in their writing processes.

From a linguistic perspective, classroom interaction can be examined through the concept of speech functions within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Speech functions describe how speakers exchange meanings and enact social roles through language, including statements, questions, commands, and offers (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In classroom discourse, the distribution of these speech functions reflects how authority, participation, and learning opportunities are structured between lecturers and students (Eggins & Slade, 1997). Analyzing speech functions therefore provides a systematic way to understand interactional patterns in writing instruction.

Previous studies have shown that EFL classrooms tend to be dominated by teacher talk, regardless of class size. Lecturers often control interaction through explanations and display questions, while students participate mainly through short responses (Walsh, 2011; Shin, 2021). Although such patterns may support instructional clarity, they can restrict students' opportunities to initiate interaction and engage in deeper meaning-making processes (Mercer & Dawes, 2014; Xie & Zhang, 2021). In writing instruction, limited interaction may hinder students' ability to respond critically to feedback and develop autonomous writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2020; Lee, 2020).

While classroom discourse has been widely studied in EFL contexts, research focusing specifically on speech functions in expository and persuasive writing instruction remains limited, particularly in small class settings. Most existing studies emphasize general classroom interaction or spoken communication, leaving academic writing classrooms underexplored (Li & Zhang, 2021; Zhang & Hyland, 2022). This gap highlights the need for closer examination of how speech functions operate in writing instruction and how interaction unfolds between lecturers and students.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze speech functions used in classroom interaction during expository and persuasive writing instruction and to examine the interactional roles of lecturers and students in a small undergraduate EFL writing class. By focusing on speech function distribution and participation patterns, this study seeks to contribute pedagogical insights into fostering more interactive and meaningful classroom interaction in academic writing instruction.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine speech functions in classroom interaction during expository and persuasive writing instruction. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore naturally occurring classroom discourse and to gain an in-depth understanding of interactional patterns rather than to produce statistical generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted in an undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing class focusing on expository and persuasive writing. The participants consisted of one lecturer and three students enrolled in the course. Although the number of students was limited, the small class size enabled detailed observation and close analysis of speech functions occurring during classroom interaction.

Data were collected through classroom observations and audio recordings of regular teaching and learning sessions. In this study, the researcher also served as the lecturer. To minimize potential bias, instructional activities were carried out as part of regular classroom practice without any modification for research purposes. The data represented naturally occurring classroom interaction, and the students were informed that their participation in the study would not affect their academic evaluation.

The recorded classroom interactions were transcribed verbatim and segmented into individual utterances. The data were analyzed using speech function categories based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), namely statements, questions, commands, and offers (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Each utterance was coded according to its communicative function in the interaction.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, observations were conducted across several class meetings, and the coding process was carried out carefully to maintain consistency. The analysis combined a quantitative description of the frequency of speech functions with qualitative interpretation to explain interactional patterns in expository and persuasive writing instruction.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the results of the analysis of speech functions in classroom interaction during expository and persuasive writing instruction. The findings are derived from classroom discourse data collected through audio recordings and transcriptions and are interpreted using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

#### A. *Distributions of Speech Functions*

The distribution of speech functions identified in the classroom interaction is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Speech Functions in Classroom Interaction

Speech Function	Lecturer	Students	Total
Statements	145 (58%)	32 (13%)	177
Question	62 (25%)	15 (6%)	77
Command	38 (15%)	5 (2%)	43
Offer	5 (2%)	3 (1%)	8
Total	250	55	305

As shown in Table 1, lecturer utterances constituted the majority of classroom interaction. This distribution demonstrated a lecturer-centered interactional pattern, where control of discourse was largely maintained by the lecturer throughout the teaching and learning process.

#### B. *Lecturer-Dominated Statements*

Statements were the most frequently occurring speech function, particularly in lecturer talk. The lecturer primarily used statements to explain key aspects of expository and persuasive writing, including thesis formulation, paragraph coherence, use of evidence, and argument development. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, statements function to give information and position the speaker as an authority (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This pattern is illustrated in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1

L : You need to clearly state your thesis in the introduction

S1 : Yes, Miss

L : Without a clear thesis, your argument will be weak.

Excerpt 2

L : In persuasive writing, your opinion must be supported by facts and examples.

S2 : Okay, Miss

L : Do not rely only on personal views.

These excerpts indicate that lecturer statements often formed extended turns, while student responses were brief and confirmatory. Such interaction limits opportunities for students to elaborate ideas or negotiate meaning, positioning them as passive recipients of information.

#### C. *Use of Questions in Classroom Interaction*

Questions were the second most frequently used speech function and were predominantly initiated by the lecturer. Lecturer questions mainly served as comprehension checks related to students' drafts or understanding of writing concepts.

Excerpt 3

L : What is the main argument of your paragraph?

S3 : About online learning

L : Yes, but you need to make it more specific.

Excerpt 4

L : Why do you think this example supports your argument?

S1 : Because it shows the effect

Although some questions prompted short explanations, most students' responses remained minimal. This finding supports previous research indicating that display questions dominate EFL classroom discourse and often restrict extended student talk (Sert, 2015; Walsh, 2011). Student-initiated questions were rare and typically focused on task clarification rather than conceptual discussion. This limited questioning behavior suggests restricted interactional space for critical inquiry in writing instruction.

#### **D. Commands and Classroom Control**

Commands were frequently used by the lecturer to manage classroom activities and guide students through the writing process. These commands included instructions for revising drafts, organizing paragraphs, and completing tasks within allocated time.

Excerpt 5

L : Revise your second paragraph and focus on coherence.

S2 : Okay, Miss

Excerpt 6

L : Submit your revised draft after you finish.

S3 : Yes.

While commands are pedagogically necessary, their frequent use reinforces hierarchical classroom relations and emphasizes task completion over dialogic engagement (Seedhouse, 2004).

#### **E. Limited Use of Offers and Student Participation**

Offers were the least frequently occurring speech function in the classroom interaction. Offers potentially create opportunities for shared decision-making and collaborative learning (Eggs & Slade, 1997), yet they appeared only occasionally in the data.

Excerpt 7

L : Would you like to revise your draft individually or discuss it together?

S1 : Discuss it together.

Excerpt 8

L : Do you want feedback on content first or language accuracy?

S2 : Content first.

These excerpts demonstrate that when offers were used, students showed greater engagement and participation. However, the limited number of offers indicates that such interactional opportunities were not systematically incorporated into the writing instruction.

#### **F. Discussion**

Overall, the findings reveal that classroom interaction in expository and persuasive writing instruction was predominantly lecturer-centered. Students mainly participated through short responses to lecturer statements, questions, and commands, with minimal initiation of interaction. This interactional pattern aligns with previous studies on EFL classroom discourse, which report similar dominance of teacher talk and limited student participation (Walsh & Li, 2018; Lee, 2020).

Although lecturer-dominated interaction supports instructional clarity, particularly in writing classrooms, the limited use of student-initiated speech functions may restrict opportunities for developing critical thinking and independent writing skills. Increasing the use of open-ended questions and offers may promote more dialogic interaction and enhance students' engagement in expository and persuasive writing.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that interaction in expository and persuasive writing instruction remains largely lecturer-driven, even within a small EFL classroom setting. This interactional dominance reflects a teaching pattern in which knowledge transmission and task control are prioritized, while students' opportunities to initiate discourse and negotiate meaning are relatively limited. Although such a pattern may support clarity and efficiency in delivering writing concepts, it also has the potential to position students as passive recipients rather than active participants in the learning process.

From a pedagogical perspective, the limited presence of student-initiated speech functions suggests that writing classrooms may not yet fully facilitate the development of critical engagement and writer autonomy. Expository and persuasive writing require students not only to comprehend textual structures and linguistic features but also to actively construct, question, and refine arguments through interaction. When classroom discourse provides minimal space for such interaction, students' opportunities for deeper cognitive and rhetorical development may be constrained.

Therefore, greater pedagogical attention should be given to how speech functions are managed and distributed in writing instruction. Incorporating more dialogic practices—such as providing students with choices, encouraging student-generated questions, and promoting collaborative discussion—can help shift classroom interaction toward a more balanced and participatory model. Such interactional adjustments are essential for fostering meaningful engagement and supporting students' development as independent and critical academic writers.

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