

Teacher's Roles in Speaking Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the teacher's roles in speaking teaching. Speaking skill is considered to be the most important skill by language learners. Learners often measure their success in language learning by the extent to which they can use their spoken English. Notwithstanding, this skill is one of the most neglected skills in language instruction. Most students do not even have the opportunity to speak in the classroom or outside it.

Moreover, speaking is not a part of the examination in most language courses. As it has been discovered by many researchers, foreign language learning best occurs through interaction, teachers should provide learners with the opportunities to communicate in English at the lesson. Since many learners' goal in language learning is to be able to communicate fluently in formal and informal interaction, classroom activities should be designed to promote oral fluency. However, the ability of speaking is a complex process in its nature; many of the learners feel anxious to speak in the classroom or outside it due to different social or psychological reasons, so they keep silent. Therefore, it is necessary for language teachers to implement some natural strategies such as: role plays, group work, projects, etc. to avoid shyness and unwillingness to speak English. Thus, the primary job of a language teacher is to encourage learners to use English not only in the classroom but also in their daily interaction with their classmates, with teachers or any other English speaking people, if possible. The present study aims at exploring the role of teachers in developing students' speaking skill.

It also attempts to investigate how much the language learners are aware of natural strategies and how often they experience them in their classrooms in Thailand. Moreover, this study attempts to shed light on the importance of teachers' role in establishing friendly and productive environment as an attempt to encourage students to use the language.

Keywords: Roles; Speaking teaching

Introduction

Learning English tends to be a need as it is becoming the global language used by Asian Economic Community. As a result, English is taught as a foreign language and have for long been the chief source of international language in the classroom. In teaching learning process, particularly in teaching language, sometimes teacher rarely considers whether what they say in class is able to encourage the students to be active to speak or not. As the fact, the teaching of English in our formal education was somehow out of the expectation. There are so many English teachers do not succeed in teaching speaking. Ironically, community will judge and expect that learner to be able to produce a spoken language well. We can see the facts based on the ability of students to speak English. Moreover, there are still lack of grammatical aspects and pronunciation coming from students, particularly the students in university level. From these facts, it seems that something is incorrect from their learning of English. It may come from the students or teacher as the parties in teaching and learning process in classroom.

Teachers who teach speaking skill highly required to have many strategies in teaching this course. It is not only a matter to deliver the material to students effectively, but also to have strategies to encourage students to be talkative in teaching and learning speaking process. One of the strategies that can influence the students speaking ability is teacher talk as the input of learning. Xiao-yan (2006) defines teacher talk (TT) as the kind of language used by the teacher for instruction in the classroom. She explains that teacher talk in English classroom is as one special variety of English language, so it has its own specific features which other varieties do not share. Teacher talk (TT) is a special communicative activity in which its goal is to communicate with students and develop students' foreign language proficiency. In English teaching and learning, when a teacher just talks to their students and if their students understand, they are not only giving the lesson about the subject, but also may be giving the best language lesson (Hariyanti, 2005).

The objective of this present study was to investigate whether teacher's talk exist in speaking class and to analyze the most dominant teacher's talk element used by the teacher and the teacher's reason to use it.

I believe that teacher talk in language classrooms remains highly significant. I therefore decided to investigate its existence in University English speaking classrooms today and the most dominant element of it and the reason behind the usage of it. My adopted definition for teacher talk in University English classroom – “whatever the teacher says to students in class” – encompasses both English and Thai.

1. Teaching Speaking

In traditional language instruction, teachers mainly focused on reading and writing whereas little attention was given to the speaking and listening skills. Only after the communicative approach had been introduced to language teaching/learning, speaking attracted more significance in language courses. Since then many language programs prioritize

speaking skill over others since mastering speaking might indicate that other language skills have also been mastered. In order to find out whether somebody knows a language we often ask “do you speak English?” Thus, knowing a language is always associated with speaking in it. Celce-Marcia (2001) states that “the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of communication”. Teaching speaking is also crucial because it can also help improve other language skills; it can help learners build vocabulary, improve grammar, listening and writing as well.

Undoubtedly, learning to communicate in the foreign language requires a lot of time and efforts. Since students already know one or sometimes more than one language, they might have some expectations about how a language works consciously and unconsciously in the human mind. Although this knowledge can help students acquire another language easier, some studies show that for language learners knowing another language can get in their way as they try to speak in the new language. Considering this, teachers should encourage learners to use their own cognitive abilities to help them activate the conscious process of learning another language.

As for the language learners, speaking skill is considered to be the most important skill. For many years FL/SL teachers thought making students repeat sentences was the best way to improve their speaking. This approach, called audio-lingual method, aims to teach the target language by practicing and repeating structural patterns in conversations (Nunan, 2003:96). It was based on behaviorism, that is, language learning is considered as habit formation and with a great deal of repetition, students learn the language. In order to form good habits the errors in the language are immediately treated by teachers. Thus, learners spend hours and hours repeating after their teachers, memorizing conversations and studying grammar structures.

However, “actual conversation did not sound like the textbook dialogues” (Nunan, 2003:50). During the last century, researches revealed that no language was learned through repetition alone. Instead, just like with infants, it is acquired and learned by means of interaction. The belief that people learn languages by means of interaction lead to a new approach to language teaching and learning called Communicative Language Teaching. This method suggests that learners can best learn English through interaction, thus it is necessary for teachers to have this crucial role, which is to provide learners with the opportunities to communicate in English during the lesson.

Similarly, according to Ur (2012) communicating orally and fluently in informal interaction is the primary goal for many language learners. For that purpose, designing classroom activities to improve students’ ability to promote oral fluency is of great importance. Ur (2012) states that getting students to talk is much more difficult than to make them read, write or listen during language courses. Thus, teachers should promote student talk activities; however, most of the lesson time is allocated for teachers to talk, instruct and manage the

classroom. Harmer (2010) states that there are three primary reasons why students must be encouraged to speak in the classroom.

First, students can have the opportunities to practice real-life speaking in the classroom atmosphere where they are likely to feel less anxiety. Second, speaking activities can provide teachers and classmates with the knowledge of how well learners can speak English, what kind of mistakes are being made so that the teachers can have the chance to focus on specific speaking features to foster. Finally, the acquired language knowledge can be activated as long as the learners speak English in the classroom; moreover, some linguistic elements can become automatic resulting in the learners' ability to use them unconsciously, and in this way the fluency can be improved.

Although EF learners have to be exposed to English as much as possible, the use of English in the classroom is limited. Thus, another important function of teachers is to provide opportunities for learners by encouraging them to use English not only in the classroom but also in their daily interaction with their classmates, with English teachers or just English speaking people, if possible. According to Huda (1999), the main source of success, in language learning, is the exposure to the language. As we have discussed earlier, spoken language has many different functions like: interactions, transactions and also performance talk or monolog (Richards, 2008). According to their frequency, they are casual conversation, monologs of different kinds, telephone conversation, conversations in shops, cafes, etc., instructions, interviews, classroom talks, etc. Thus, speakers have to adjust the type of the language according to the psychological and social role they play in their daily communications. Native speakers are usually conscious of turn-taking, how/when to speak and how/when to listen. Thus, EFL teachers should teach learners to become conscious of such nuances of discourse in order to avoid misunderstanding and offending the people they are talking to. This ability to adjust and accommodate one's language to the context is called Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1971).

In spite of many studies which postulate that listening helps students build new vocabulary, improve grammar and even speaking, many other studies confirm that speaking in the target language significantly helps learners to acquire the language. Researches demonstrate that the most successful learners are the ones who use English to communicate with native speakers at least about an hour in a week (Noonan, 2014). Although comprehensible input is of great significance, many researchers believe it can be best acquired through interaction. It is because, during the interactional communications with other speakers, that they use situational context, repetition, clarification in order to understand better, and this input, which is beyond their present level of English, will help them acquire the language better (Ellis, 1997).

Since the knowledge of language is more complex than syntax or lexis, teachers are expected to expose language learners to the linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competencies. To wrap up, learners should be made aware of how to construct language to

have a coherent language use, to be conscious of the importance of the social context and to be able to use alternative or non-verbal means of communication when they fail in words.

2. The teachers' role

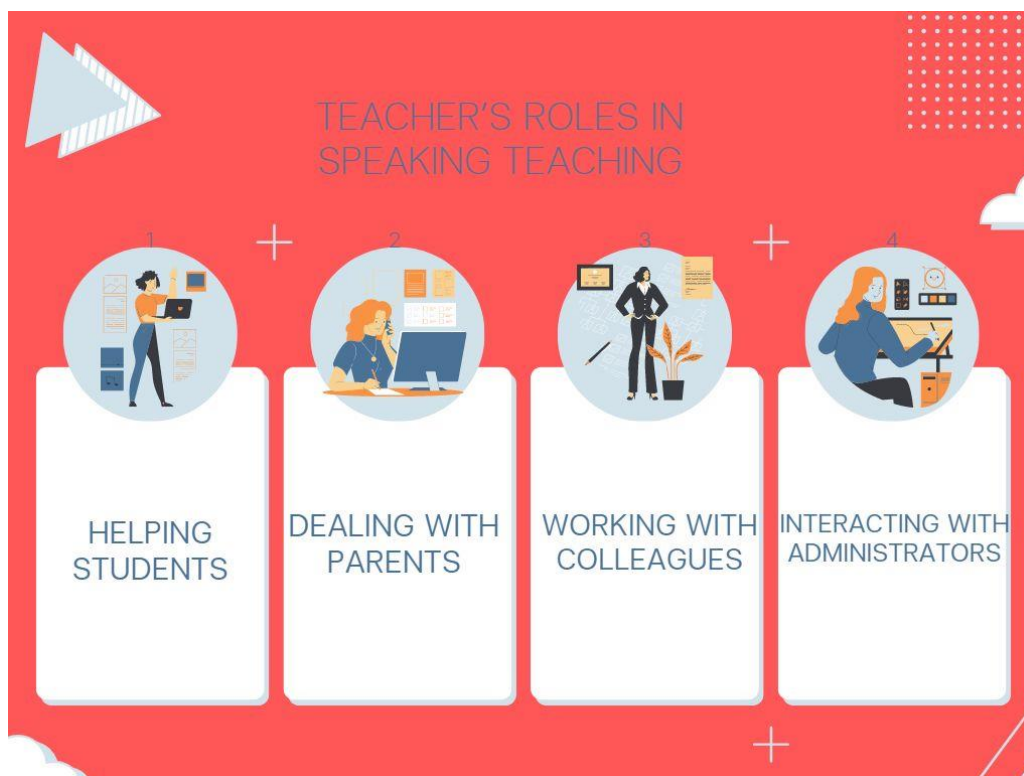
In order for the teacher find better possibilities for his own teaching in communicative approach he/she is expected to adopt varied appropriate roles for managing various classroom activities. For example, while planning activities, the teacher should be able to perform in accordance with what objectives each activity does entail. Accuracy and fluency activities for example determine two distinct teacher's roles. According to Harmer (1991) in some activities that require more of the teacher's activity like accurate production, the teacher should be able to act as controller, whereas in communicative tasks that demand learner's group or pair interaction, the teacher should act as facilitator by not intervening frequently.

In addition, the teacher should allow students with more opportunities to use the language. In other words, the teacher should be clear of his tasks where he must not act as controller in both cases. To this effect, the teacher should always be committed in terms of securing such as interactive classroom by way of acting less dominantly. To this effect (Ellis, 1997) says "teacher-centered classrooms are not interactive classrooms in their nature, and this is what language teachers need to learn. Interaction can be two ways, three ways, or four ways but never one way." Thus, giving the learners a different role (such as greater initiative in the classroom) requires the teachers to adopt a different role. According to Breen and Candlin (1980) as cited in Nunan (1989:87), the teacher has three main roles in the communicative classroom. The first is play as a facilitator of the communication process, the second is play as participant and the third is play as observer and learner (ibid). In general terms, according to Larsen-freeman (1986), Little Wood, (1981); Harmer (1991) in communicative oriented classroom, the teacher should act as 'counselor', 'facilitator', organizer, participant, prompter, resource, etc. instead of being an actor of the stage. In general, it can be seen that in oral communicative classroom the teacher in most cases possesses the role of facilitator rather than controller.

According to Harmer (2007:107) a teacher is like "a gardener, because they plant seeds and watch them grow". Students are the field and the seed is the knowledge planted by their educators. As a gardener takes very good care of the plants, the teacher also plays different roles in their life. In ELT classes teachers are expected to teach effectively, to guide students and to keep order in the classroom. However, the main role teachers are expected to play is providing and maintaining good and quality education (Leu, 2005). In order to achieve quality, teachers need to have the courage to use their energy, knowledge with motivation. So that teachers can play various roles according to the skills and needs of the learners.

Knowledge from the Study

Communication skills are important for many professions but are crucial for teachers. Teachers communicate with students, parents, colleagues and administrators every day. Whether communicated face-to-face, on the phone, in print, electronically or through the public address system, the message must be constructed carefully and delivered clearly to be properly received. Good handwriting, spelling and grammar are very important in all forms of written communication.



1. Helping Students

Communication skills involve listening as well as speaking. Teachers who listen attentively to their students' questions and complaints are better equipped to meet individual needs and adjust lessons where necessary. Students are also more likely to be receptive when the teacher's body language and tone of voice indicate openness and encouragement. Appropriate use of audio-visual aids also can enhance presentations and make them easier for students to follow.

2. Dealing with Parents

Teachers should communicate frequently with parents and not wait for scheduled parent-teacher interviews. Reporting good news regularly strengthens the teacher-parent relationship and makes it easier for the parent to hear bad news when necessary. Teachers who are good communicators can share negative reports about students tactfully and without

suggesting blame and also state their message clearly enough so the parents understand the concern. Skillfully delivered communication can earn respect from the parents and support for working together toward a positive outcome.

3. Working with Colleagues

Although teachers spend most of their working day surrounded by 20 or more students, they often become flustered when speaking in front of their colleagues at staff meetings or conferences. Communication skills improve with practice, and preparing in advance what to say also helps. Taking a leadership role with other teachers in the school by chairing or co-chairing a committee provides the opportunity to enhance these skills. Communicating with colleagues in this way may be very rewarding and personally fulfilling. It also shows initiative, which can lead to advancement or promotion.

4. Interacting With Administrators

Teachers who are skillful communicators have a better chance of being heard by administrators when making a request, such as for a transfer, special leave or permission for a student event or field trip. Good communicators clearly state the reasons for their request, anticipate possible counter-arguments and are prepared to refute them. They control their emotions, don't lose their tempers and always behave in a professional manner, even in disappointing or frustrating situations. Administrators who recognize such efforts are more receptive to granting a positive response to teacher requests.

Conclusion

A teacher is like “a gardener, because he/she plants the seeds and watches them grow”. Students are the field and the seed is seen as the knowledge planted by educators. As a gardener takes very good care of the roses, flowers, waters them when necessary, the teacher also plays different roles in the lives of the students not only by planting knowledge in them but also acting as a model in the classroom and outside it with their personal lives. According to Vilar (2003), teachers have two primary functions in education: the managerial and the instructional functions. The latter refers to the conditions that teachers create for learning to take place and the other is the knowledge that the teachers impart in the classrooms. Teachers should carry out these functions simultaneously for efficient language instruction because they cannot be separated.

In ELT classes teachers are expected to teach effectively, to guide students and to keep order in the classroom. However, the most crucial role teachers are expected to play is providing and maintaining a good quality of education (Leu, 2005). In order to achieve this quality, teachers should be encouraged to use their energy, knowledge along with motivation. Thus, teachers should play various roles according to the skills and needs of the learners. The roles teachers play in ELT field are mostly of an assessor, organizer, facilitator, prompter, motivator, participant, monitor, model, etc.

A good teacher is the one who assesses their students speaking skill by means of both observations and quizzes or exams designed to evaluate oral proficiency of the learners. However, in most language instruction courses, assessment of the students' speaking skill is usually ignored. For perfecting students' speaking skill the teachers have the role of an assessor (R M. Harden & J. Crosby, 2000). Organizer is one of the most important roles of teachers during speaking activities. This is more than just explaining or doing some oral exercises. Teacher should know what kind of activity to use at first or what to do after that. This role includes different aspects of teaching contexts. For example: what kind of method and materials the students need, how to organize an activity and how long it should last or to have alternative activities if something goes wrong with the current activity.

According to Harmer (2001:275-6) there are three important roles that teachers can play if they want to get their learners to speak fluently. One of them is the prompter. It is when students are not sure about how to do a task, teachers often play the role as a prompter. During the speaking tasks, learners might demonstrate a kind of struggling when they try to express themselves. In this case, the teacher usually gives hints, suggests phrases or vocabulary. However, the teacher should be careful when he/she gives prompts to students during oral tasks because the primary purpose of prompting is to give the right amount of motivation and encouragement. We should not "take the initiative away from the students" (Harmer, 2007: 109). One more role is that of the participant. This is when teachers participate in discussions not as teachers but as peers of L2 learners. The teacher usually assigns students to perform a speaking activity and from time to time intervenes to give feedback or corrects mistakes only when necessary. This role enables teachers to understand difficulties learners face during speaking activities. When giving any task to the students, the teachers can actually do the task themselves so that they can anticipate the difficulties that the students might encounter and better equip them with the strategies for that task. As a participant, the teacher can also make sure that students participate and are involved in the task. On the other hand, he/she shouldn't dominate the discussion. The next role according to Harmer is a "feedback provider".

This is when teachers give feedback after the oral activity. Teachers should be very careful when they give feedback since over-correction might hinder students' motivation to talk. But encouraging responses may drive students to carry out the oral tasks with self-confidence which will in turn improve their speaking ability.

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