

## USING ENGLISH EFFECTIVELY IN THE CLASSROOM

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The article is devoted to the analysis of the ways of using English effectively in the classroom. It is pointed out that learners are more likely to participate actively, creatively and autonomously if teachers offer appealing communicative scenarios or frameworks for partly self-directed target language use and accept errors and mistakes as a natural part of the overall learning process.

Key words: communicative language teaching, effective teaching, classroom interaction, peer-to-peer communication, foreign language learning.

It is a matter of common knowledge that if we want our students to use English in the classroom, it is important that we, as teachers, try and use English as much as possible. Not only are we setting an example, but we are also giving our students exposure to the language. However, many teachers are reluctant to use English or have some difficulties. There are many reasons why teachers might be reluctant to use English in the classroom: lack of confidence in their ability to use English; not actually knowing the right words or phrases; worrying that they do not have the time and that it is faster to explain in the students L1; fear of making mistakes or lack of confidence in their pronunciation; worrying that the students might not understand if they speak in English; simply that it is easier to speak in their L1 [1]. This article aims to consider the ways of using English effectively in the classroom.

To begin with, it is worth noting that to overcome difficulties when speaking English in the classroom, it is possible to use the following: plan your lessons carefully; think about what you want to say and write it down; check anything you are not sure about; use a dictionary; talk and share with other teachers; do not worry about making mistakes and be prepared to admit when you do not know; speak slowly and clearly.

It is obvious that the role of teacher talk is to maximize students' learning. Teachers assist students in learning a new language through classroom talk. With the advent of communicative language teaching, classroom interaction analysis has emphasized the amount of TTT (Teacher Talking Time) and the ratio in comparison to STT (Student Talking Time). This did serve a purpose in making language teachers aware of the difference between teacher-fronted and learner-centered teaching practices. However, as Tennant makes clear, the quantity of teacher and students talk is not necessarily directly related [2]. That is, if the teacher only speaks for 20% of the time it does not necessarily mean that the students will speak for the remaining 80% of the time. Instead he suggests we focus on the quality of talk and uses the terms QTT (Quality Teacher Talk) and QST (Quality Student Talk) [1].

It is necessary to point out that teachers should use questions to facilitate language learning. The types of questions they frequently ask could be inhibiting or encouraging communication in the target language. The questions teachers ask can serve the following purposes: recognition, recall, reorganization, inferential, evaluation, and appreciation. In general, it is important that teachers try to use questions that encourage communication and generate language in order to help students learn English [3].

Moreover, teachers need to learn to give clear instructions in English for the tasks they want the students to do. However, in our experience teachers frequently have the following problems when giving instructions: they use L1 and not English; they read out instructions in the coursebook rather than getting students to read the instructions themselves; they repeat the instructions and do not give students time to understand the task; they give instructions that are far too complicated; they give instructions that contain redundant language, i.e. lots of repetition; they do not give other support, i.e. gestures, written back-up etc.

The primary purpose of instructions is to get the students to do a specific task. The clearer the instructions and the more support the teacher gives, the more likely it is that students will actually do the task. However, giving instructions in English also gives students exposure to real, meaningful language. Even when we use support

such as gestures it is good to slowly withdraw this support and make the students more reliant on the verbal instructions.

In addition, feedback on what students do is an essential part of teaching and learning. When teachers give feedback they can encourage or discourage students' language use. The way a teacher gives feedback and the language they use can reflect the teacher's deep-seated views of teaching and learning. The language the teacher uses in the classroom is an important factor in making the teaching communicative and effective. Thinking about exactly what you will say, why you will say it and how you will say it takes time and planning.

Meanwhile, in many foreign language classrooms worldwide, there is often very little room for learners to voice their own thoughts and ideas and, furthermore, experiment with the target language in meaningful contexts and ways. As a considerable body of research shows, instruction in many EFL classrooms is usually largely pre-planned and scripted, predominantly organized, in terms of (teacher) initiation, (learner) response and (teacher) feedback sequences [4]. More generally speaking, foreign language instruction is all too often viewed in terms of implementing a carefully structured curriculum, attending to a particular approach or methodology, following a specific procedure, actuating a fixed lesson plan, and interacting in pre-arranged, often teacher-led ways. Clearly, in contexts like these there is usually very little communicative space for learners to participate spontaneously in an experimental, experiential and improvised manner [5]. Current education reforms initiated and implemented in many countries in recent years seem to exacerbate this problem by placing primary emphasis on the ability to perform to fine-graded standards of competency and skill. Imagination, creativity and flexibility are chiefly viewed from this restrictive perspective. Moreover, creativity is typically thought of as an individual process or product, not as a co-operative endeavour. In general, current reform initiatives focus much more on accelerating measurable individual progress in discrete areas of language learning than on fostering mental agility, communicative flexibility, resourceful spontaneity and a commitment to lifelong foreign language learning [4].

In current international second language acquisition (SLA) and TEFL research, there is growing evidence that thinking of classroom instruction and interaction in terms of a dynamic interplay of routine and novelty, planning and improvisation, and predictability and unpredictability appears to be highly important for promoting creative and flexible language use and, ultimately, for successful learning and teaching [6]. However, conceiving of learning and teaching in terms of disciplined improvisational practice is by no means new. Johann Friedrich Herbart referred to this fundamental issue as pedagogical tact or tactfulness [4]. He originally framed learning in schools in terms of cultivating the voice of the learner, placing strong emphasis on teaching as theory-informed, quick-witted professional decision-making in the here-and-now of the classroom. Viewed from this perspective, promoting learner-centred, spontaneous interactional flexibility within a supportive, thoroughly planned, but not entirely scripted learning environment is a key to orchestrating lively and fruitful EFL classroom interaction. In sum, it appears to be important that teachers distance themselves from what Sawyer refers to as educational ‘script-think’. Underhill and Maley address this issue in terms of ‘expecting the unexpected’ in class [4]. Improvisations are task-driven opportunities for flexible communicative interaction in the classroom, primarily designed to promote spontaneous, increasingly complex, fluent, accurate and contextually appropriate language use between learners. The overall focus is on promoting experimental oral practice in carefully planned, but partially unpredictable situations in which learners are allowed and encouraged to get their individual ideas and messages across in many different ways, both verbally and non-verbally, activating and stretching their entire communicative repertoire. As communicative journeys into the unknown, improvisations offer EFL learners a carefully designed communicative framework for context and culture-sensitive talk-in-interaction. In this way, they are intended to bring together two fundamental aspects of natural face-to-face exchanges outside of the classroom: the predictability of everyday communicative events and social scripts as well as behavioural patterns and routines; the unpredictability of spontaneous ideas and thematic shifts within a given socio-communicative framework.

In order to enhance target language learning and learning awareness systematically, improvisations consist of two parts: an improvisational framework for increasingly self-directed peer-to-peer communication, followed by teacher-guided or teacher-supported whole-class or group reflection, conducted in the target language as well. Here, teachers ought to avoid focusing primarily on learners' communicative problems and target language deficits. Since nothing succeeds like success, enhancing and adjusting learners' communicative contributions have to go hand in hand. This does not mean that explicit error treatment (attention to language form) is to be neglected, but it needs to be integrated in a way that is not threatening the learners' willingness to speak. If, and only if, the reflective part of an improvisation is approached and conducted this way, it can serve as a fruitful basis for subsequent enactments, reflections and, ultimately, participatory empowerment in the target language. All in all, improvisations are complex learning activities that seek to combine experientially grounded learner action with teacher-guided communicative reflection in a cyclical, rather than a linear way [4].

Each of the exemplary improvisations should be designed to provide learners with a flexible, situated dialogical framework that consists of:

- a brief opening sequence (a scripted opening part or lead-in intended to break the ice and to reduce speaking inhibitions among learners);
- an unscripted middle part with a few communicative cues or incentives that leave enough space for a wide range of spontaneous ideas, interpretations and learner-learner exchanges, based on prior knowledge and skill;
- in contrast to the traditional role plays of the early 1970s, a communicative 'emergency exit' sequence (a scripted final part with which the improvised dialogue can be brought to an end once the participants feel that they cannot or do not want to go any further).

Empowering foreign language learners to communicate increasingly freely takes time and patience. As case-study research carried out in various EFL classrooms in Germany indicates, learners are more likely to participate actively, creatively and autonomously, if teachers offer appealing communicative scenarios or

frameworks for partly self-directed target language use, and, furthermore, orchestrate oral classroom interaction tactfully, as it emerges [7]. This entails being prepared for and accepting errors and mistakes as a natural part of the overall learning process. Interrupting and explicitly correcting learners while they are trying to get a message across will almost certainly reduce their willingness to improvise and take communicative risks.

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