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TEACHER AND LEARNER TALK IN A MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

The main aim of the present article is to examine the relationships that exist between teacher and learner talk in a modern foreign language classroom (on the example of the English language), and the overall influence that they have on the way classroom discourse is structured. Attention will be paid to different contexts and settings where the English language is taught and learnt, and talking about classroom interaction per se – this will be examined from the perspective of: teacher and learner talk, feedback, error/mistake correction, questions and, last but not least, syllabus and curriculum choice.

Firstly though, I think it would be a good idea to concentrate on environments where the English language can be taught or learnt. In his sociolinguistic model of present-day Englishes, Braj Kachru (1985) lists six (typically monolingual) English-speaking states such as: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland. English there is the mother tongue used by the majority of the population on a daily basis.

Having said that, the inhabitants of such post-colonial states, in turn, as: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Kenya, the Republic of South Africa, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore frequently refer to English (in its institutionalised form) as their second (auxiliary or intracommunity) language.

To take a different example, Taylor (1996) speaks of BANA (British – including the Republic of Ireland, Australian, North American countries), Holliday (1994) of TESEP (tertiary, secondary, primary) ELT methods where English is learnt as either arterial or second/foreign language, respectively

while Crystal (1997) of inner circle (that is English as the first language), outer circle (English as a second language), and expanding circle (English as a foreign language) concepts.

The basic unit of pedagogic discourse is the three-phase interactional pattern known under the name Initiation-Response-Feedback/Follow-up (Mehan, 1974) or IRF – after the initials of the triad sequence. The IRF/IRE approach to the exchange of information is basically a tool of teacher-led instruction (or recitation) discouraging student initiation and repair work (Curran, 2008) in which, as Johnson admits "who talks, when and about what are controlled by the teacher"[1]. And it is the teacher who always initiates these teaching cycles as they are originally called by Bellack et al. (1966), and the student's role is restricted to giving a reply with the index pattern of discussion ending with feedback or evaluation (in either verbal or non-verbal form), or both.

This unequal distribution of power (teachers filling in two of the three slots) makes it incompatible with the findings of communicative language teaching methodology as discourse rights (such as, for instance, initiating and closing exchanges, determining their length, including and excluding participants as well as deciding on the number and order of their turns) are granted to teachers but not learners. As a consequence, that particular discourse sample (the IRF paradigm) becomes monopolised by pedagogues. One explanation of the fact that the teacher fills in the third slot too, Coulthard posits, is that" the teacher is not seeking information in the accepted sense, as he already knows the answer, but it is essential for the pupils to know whether their answer is the one the teacher was looking for, and hence there is a situational necessity for the follow-up move"[2].

Indeed, classroom discourse (formalised and predetermined in nature), aims to describe and understand the way language is used and experienced (McCarthy, 2007). McTear (1975) reports that L2 classroom discourse may have, so called, pseudo-communicative intentions while Ellis (1988), on the other hand, calls those instances of formalised and predetermined language type modelled data. It can be perceived as authentic communication (as in the case of naturalistic discourse, i.e. outside the pedagogic environment) which is unstructured and unpredictable, termed communicative data in-

[1] Johnson K.E., *Understanding communication in second language classrooms*, Cambridge 1995, p. 108.

[2] Coulthard M., *An introduction to discourse analysis* (2nd ed.), Harlow 1985, p. 135.

stead (Ellis, 1988), and where participants share equal discourse rights when involved in activity-oriented interactions (Majer, 2003).

Classroom interaction, as a matter of fact, is not planned – rather co-produced with the learners (Ellis, 1994). And unspoken classroom rules, Ellis writes, are not always observed – even within the IRF cycle: a teacher-student exchange that typically is reduced to the transaction itself, which takes place "when the teacher deviates from the main goal to deal with some issue that has cropped up. [...] the teacher's input occurs as a response to something the pupils have said rather than as a pre-planned teacher-initiated exchange"[3].

Rivers' definition makes reciprocity an indispensable requirement for any interaction to occur – and, indeed, "learning arises not through interaction, but in interaction"[4], Ellis admits. Allwright calls it "by definition and in practice"[5] a co-production, Riley uses the term collaborative construct "of two or more participants whose contributions or turns combine to form interactive structure in terms of who speaks when and to whom"[6], and Cazden supports this viewpoint alike by comparing lessons to social events "produced by the collaborative work of all the parties involved"[7].

Talking of strictly classroom environment, however, it is possible for teachers to plan what and how to teach and outer and inner discourse structures, both terms coined by Sinclair and Brazil (1982), can be of some help in that, as Ellis says,

> [o]uter language consists of utterances which provide a framework for the lesson, enabling pedagogic activities to take place. Such utterances are produced by both the teacher and the students. Inner language consists of those utterances produced during the course of a pedagogic activity; it is comprised of the samples of language designated as the goal of the activity[8].

It is not surprising that it is the teacher that fills most of the lesson time with their form-and-accuracy centred talk, or teacherese (Van Lier, 1996) – as opposed to peer/learner or interlanguage talk (Krashen, 1981). Said that, one

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3 Ellis R., *Classroom second language development*, New York 1988, p. 106.

4 Ellis R., *Task-based research and language pedagogy*, "Language Teaching Research" 2000, 49, p. 209.

5 Allwright R., *The importance of interaction in classroom language learning*, "Applied Linguistics" 1984, 5, p. 159.

6 Riley P. (ed.), *Discourse and learning*, London 1985, p. 338.

7 Cazden C.B., *Classroom discourse. The language of teaching and learning*, Portsmouth 1988, p. 44.

8 Ellis R., *Learning a second language through interaction*, Amsterdam 1999, p. 213.

can also deal either with the non-native EFL teacher's TEFLese (Willis, 1990) or the native-speaker teacher's TESLese (Patil, 1994). Such talk, if reciprocal (that is between both the teacher and students alike) leads to the formation of classroom transactions – we cannot speak of classroom conversations though for talk, Cook admits, may only be classed as conversation when:

a. it is not primarily necessitated by a practical task,
b. any unequal power of participants is partially suspended,
c. the number of the participants is small,
d. turns are quite short, and
e. talk is primarily for the participants not for an outside audience.

The purpose of teacherese, however, is, among other things, to:

a. provide students with comprehensible input,
b. provide students with feedback,
c. generate a repair,
d. ask a question and then immediately react to the learner's response,
e. manage the class (but also the teaching and learning process),
f. allocate turns (teachers, granted unlimited participation rights, have the authority indeed to nominate the learners) etc.[9]

Moreover, it is also the teacher, or rather their talk, that is responsible for providing the students with raw (primary) linguistic data, or positive input, which has a real communicative purpose as well as serves as an L2 model. Following Niżegorodcew, this is defined as "the language the learners hear in the naturalistic environment"[10]. In contrast, corrective (secondary) linguistic data, or negative input, the authoress continues, constitutes

> [t]he language that the learners hear in the instructional environment, and which is specially focused on those features of the learners' interlanguage they are not able to correct by themselves on the basis of raw (primary) linguistic data, since they do not receive enough information about those features in it. Secondary linguistic data (...) are necessary to enable the learners to acquire native-like L2[11].

Also, it is the task of language teachers to provide their students with feedback (be it linguistic or performance) in order to reinforce well-formed structures and correct (and, thus, prevent) ill-formed ones. The latter can be errors of competence like malapropisms or mistakes of performance such as:

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[9] Cook G., *Discourse*, Oxford 1989, p. 51.

[10] Niżegorodcew A., *Input for instructed L2 learners. The relevance of relevance*, Clevedon 2007, p. 143.

[11] Tamże.

– spelling,
– wrong tense usage,
– concord – the agreements between subject and verb,
– wrong word order,
– inappropriate language,
– punctuation,
– a word missing or
– unclear meaning, just to name a few.

This compulsory element of classroom communication, as Sinclair and Coulthard call it (1975), has the form of interruptions (rather than overlaps) if initiated by the teacher, but it can equally well be negotiated and supplied by students alike, especially during pair- or group-work activities – as a consequence, it is attended to and learnt from by others in the class.

Error/mistake correction and/or feedback can be provided with the help of, for instance:

– echoing,
– clarification,
– repetition,
– back-channelling (non-verbal signals, verbal tokens and verbal signals),
– back-shadowing (sentence completions at potential turn transition points),
– recasts (reformulation and outright correction by changing one or more sentence components considered, as a matter of fact, impolite in naturalistic discourse),
– reframing (using different words or phrases) or
– metalinguistic clues.

Mistakes (or errors), Bartram and Walton claim, are not deliberate for "[l]anguage learners are involved in an elaborate process: sometimes the language they produce reflects the point they have reached, but often it does not. Rather than criticise the product, it may be the teacher's job to aid the process. After all, students do not usually make mistakes deliberately"[12].

And, as for feedback – it can be: corrective in the form of explicit advice (all error correction is, in fact, feedback), strategic and given usually in students' mother tongue, cognitive or affective – both ranging from positive to neutral to negative but also covert or overt. The latter, quite discouraging in its form, can easily be replaced with confirmation checks or clarification requests as can outright corrective feedback as a whole. Indeed, it often happens that

[12] Bartram M., Walton R., *Correction. A positive approach to language mistakes*, Hove 1991, p. 19.

communication problems, both unintended forms and misunderstandings, are diagnosed and cured by EFL interactants themselves whatever the pedagogic context, distinguished by Seedhouse (1999) is: form and accuracy, classroom as a speech community, task-oriented or real-world target speech community.

The learner's response to feedback, called uptake, leads, most often, to student-generated repair for which (i.e. repair) Hatch (1983) uses the name reruns. Walsh, for instance, believes that "[w]hile repair between native and non-native adults outside the classroom might be deemed inappropriate, since it would result in a loss of face, there is absolutely no reason why errors should not be corrected in the L2 formal context"[13]. When it comes to overall repair classification, four types are distinguished and these are, already mentioned:

1) self-initiated self-repair,
2) self-initiated other-repair,
3) other-initiated self-repair, and
4) other-initiated other-repair (the only choice being, to put it in simple terms, between self- and other-initiation of repair).

Equally important in teacher-learner interaction are questions; their significance is yet realized in the second decade of the 20th century with the emergence of the Natural and the Direct Method. With the time going by their importance has been developed even further although, generally speaking, questions: lower- or fact, rather than higher- or reason level ones are blamed indeed for not stimulating students' critical or cognitive thinking abilities (such as hypothesising, analysing, synthesising and generalising). They can perform a number of different roles from, as it has been stated above:

– gaining immediate feedback,
– eliciting particular structures (such is also the role of Socratic dialogue),
– providing a language model,
– encouraging student participation,
– checking or testing comprehension,
– giving students practice and output opportunities (characteristic feature indeed of what Hüllen and Lörcher, 1989, call repetitive classroom discourse) or
– just making sure that everyone gets a chance to answer.

Lynch maintains that questioning patterns – referential i.e. real, genuine ones (Lynch, 1996) rather than display patterns i.e. known-answer questions

[13] Walsh S., *Investigating classroom discourse*, Abingdon 2006, p. 10.

(Cazden, 1988), known information questions (Mehan, 1979), pseudo-questions (Hatch and Long, 1980) or pedagogic questions (Lynch, 1996), specifically, "have been shown to be a means by which teachers exert control over the interaction, and not simply a means of eliciting information"[14], and are therefore preferred in communicative language teaching.

Apart from questions, both teachers and students can perform a number of requests such as (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989):

a. the use of mood derivable utterances (e.g. repeat, please),
b. hedged performatives preceded with a hedge (e.g. I'd like to ask you to),
c. query preparatory (e.g. would you mind),
d. deontic modals (e.g. have to),
e. alerters (honorific attention getting devices e.g. excuse me, Miss/Sir),
f. suggestory formulas (e.g. how about),
g. downgraders:(e.g. I wonder if or do you think...?) or
h. want statements (students, in their appeals for assistance, authority or verification, make frequent use of extended justifications and explanations and, generally, over-rely on e.g. please).

Finally, school curriculum might also be one of the reasons for learning foreign languages according to Harmer (1995), followed by (although the list, its author says, is not exhaustive): advancement, target language community, English for Specific Purposes, culture and miscellaneous (that is all the others). And Hinkel adds to that that as for the teaching of the skill of speaking, listening, reading, and writing modern curricula "strive to achieve a balance between the linguistic and the schematic aspects of learner language development"[15].

As we have seen throughout the present paper, reciprocal interaction in a formalised and predetermined modern foreign language classroom (on the example of the English language) can take many different forms realised either through teacher or learner talk.

The final factor – school syllabus and curriculum mentioned towards the article's end is equally crucial, however. Indeed, Celce-Murcia and Olshatin (2007), drawing on Dubin and Olshtain's (1986) definition, recall the social context of learning and the importance of language use as far as discourse approach towards curriculum design is taken into consideration. Last but by no

[14] Lynch T., *Communication in the language classroom*, Oxford 1996, p. 108.
[15] Hinkel E., *Current perspectives on teaching the four skills*, "TESOL Quarterly" 2006, 40(1), p. 111.

means least – it is worth mentioning that the aforementioned authors also notice that "a curriculum should be implemented through a variety of syllabuses and each of these syllabuses should be compatible with the overall curriculum"[16].

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[16] Celce-Murcia M., Olshtain E., *Discourse and context in language teaching. A guide for language learners*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 185.

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Abstract

Dyskurs klasowy nauczyciela i ucznia w nauczaniu nowożytnego języka obcego (na przykładzie języka angielskiego)

W artykule tym przedmiotem opisu jest dyskurs klasowy (związany z nauczaniem języka angielskiego). Poznanie dyskursu klasowego (sformalizowanego i ustalonego

z góry) pozwala na opisanie i zrozumienie sposobu, w jaki korzystamy z języka i jak go doświadczamy. Wszystkie podejścia do dyskursu klasowego są do pewnego stopnia powiązane z analizą interakcji, przy czym uczenie się nie następuje poprzez interakcję, lecz w interakcji. Samą interakcję można traktować jako „kolaboratywny konstrukt". Prawa do kontrolowania dyskursu przyznane są głównie nauczycielowi, a nie uczniom (mowa nauczyciela wypełnia dwa z trzech przydziałów czasu w trakcie lekcji). Konsekwencją tego jest fakt, że ten szczególny rodzaj dyskursu staje się zmonopolizowany przez nauczycieli. Istotnym warunkiem efektywnego nauczania jest także dbałość o kompatybilność sylabusów z ogólnym programem nauczania.