

Overcoming Constraints in Classroom Talk: An over view

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Abstract:-English Language teachers begin the regular English class with various strategies; inquiring about previous class work, structures to be taught in the class, homework done and student responses etc. The teacher tries to end up the classes with few questions; trying to evaluate their understanding of the text taught and the reasons for lack of comprehension. It is increasingly found that the ELT classrooms are filled with teacher talk, though the advocates of communicative approach believe in learner centric approach. However, most of the real classroom teaching is done with enumerable constraints in teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper suggests some of the strategies that motivate the learners to speak, to question and to think critically.

KeyWords: (Teacher Talk, Constraints, Learner Centric Approach, and Teaching Materials etc)

I. Introduction

Learning English is mainly an attempt to communicate with people in both academic and non-academic contexts. The ultimate goal of teaching English is also to enable the learners to communicate. Research studies by (Brown, 1987; Ommagio, 1986; and Widdowson, 1978) emphasize that teaching English is to make the learners to be better communicators with each other in the real world situations. The core objective of any English course is to make the students to communicate in their job-oriented career and also in enabling them to meet their social needs. However, most of the students lack communication skills and bank on joining instant spoken English training institutions leaving the regular academic course at question mark. It is imperative for the teachers to devote time for the students in building on their language skills using authentic and relevant materials in the language class. These issues are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

II. Background of the study

The data for the present study was collected from 200 students studying their pre university course a part of Six year undergraduate programme at RGUKT (Rajiv Gandhi University Knowledge Technology). All the students joining RGUKT are school toppers from various districts of Telangana state. It was observed that while teaching the intermediate syllabus English faculty dominantly speaks in class while teaching a particular text. It turned out to be a teacher centered-talk class rather than a student-centered class. Year after year students pass by with same bunch of knowledge which failed to prove securing the desired jobs. An observation has been made by the researcher over a period of six years in RGUKT on Teaching English, which says that most of the teaching English in the class room is done on teacher centric approach where it is continuously emphasized saying that student centric class rooms in

theory. The ultimate aim of any English course is to assist the learners use the target language effectively. Before continuing to explain or illustrate further, here are some questions listed for the teachers to think and figure out possible solutions...

- 1) Who talks much in the classroom of teaching & learning context?
- 2) What kind of talk goes on in your classroom?
- 3) Who initiates and ends up the talk?
- 4) Who decides who should speak /what should be spoken?
- 5) Who asks most of the questions?
- 6) What about the quality of listening in your classroom?
- 7) What students do exactly in the classroom?

Therefore, it is often found that these practices in classroom teaching/learning are done by teachers rather than the students. However, it becomes essential for teachers to pay individual attention to “students talk” especially focusing on ‘what they say’ as well as ‘how they say it’.

III. Review of the Literature

According to Morgan and Saxton (1991) learning springs from curiosity, from the need to know. A good teacher capitalizes on that innate feeling by attracting, maintaining, and satisfying the attention of learners while giving them something worthwhile to think about. It is the learners who actively go about learning. Research studies have shown that the most common classroom exchange has three terms 1) **Teacher asks**, 2) **Learner answers**, 3) **Teachers evaluate**. This sequence is repeated thousand times a day in classrooms all over the world. It is what passes from teaching to learning.

Morgan and Saxton emphasize on students talking and questioning in the classroom rather than teachers and observe that, “The classic concept of learning is that it

occurs when the teacher asks the questions and the students can answer them but the reality is that learning does not occur until the learner needs to know and can formulate the question for himself (1991:75)”

IV. Methodology/Classroom Observation

It's evident from the observation that teachers predominantly speak in the modern RGUKT communicative language classrooms at IIIT Basar. But what is the nature of this talk and on whose monitoring does it take place is questionable. Modern teachers are supported by many recent innovative and current textbooks and e-textbooks, have been encouraged to foster speaking through various techniques and strategies such as role play, project work, and dialogue practice along with the various interaction patterns in the classroom by making extensive use of pair work and group work as well as whole class sessions. What is found at the outset is in appropriate talk and relatively meaningless talk, may be because of topics chosen are banal and trivial, perhaps making linguistic demands on learners, but certainly not stretching their capacity for critical thinking.

V. Students' Samples

The purpose of teacher's question is all too often not to listen to what the learner says, but rather to how s/he says it. Here is an example of how the teacher reacted to the student's response to his question in the classroom while teaching the module “**Thinking out of the Box: Lateral thinking and Logical thinking by Edward De Bono**”. Through this lesson teacher can assist to develop critical thinking in students and encourage them to use lateral thinking in their real life situations.

Example 1: Teacher: *What did you do last weekend, Mr. Ajay?*

Mr. Ajay: *My family and me gone to the khoti for shopping, from there I-max theatre watched Spiderman movie, eating popcorn and followed by Ice-cream. After the movie we are coming back to our house.*

Teacher: *Mr. Ajay, it is not me its 'I', not gone, 'went' ate popcorn, we came back home. See how many mistakes you made. You should be careful while speaking, learn properly and never repeat them again. Sit down.*

Teacher: *After my feedback with little correction I saw Mr. Ajay dull and inactive. I also asked few others to share their experiences of weekend. Surprisingly no one dared. Then I got to continue the class with that day's lesson.*

Here is another example, which proves that how a child can learn the language through the art of question, critical thinking, and taking initiation. For instance: Listening to any child-parent conversation will sooner or later reveal the way a child uses talk to gain knowledge and understand. Here is another example of how a child acquires knowledge naturally at home environment amongst her/his family members.

Example 2:

Girl: Mummy, where are we going?

Mother: To the market honey.

Girl: Where is the market and which market?

Mother: Vegetable market honey, it's near the Bustand

Girl: Mummy who comes to the market?

Mother: Everyone honey, whoever wants to buy vegetables, your friend Radha's mother will also come.

Girl: Oh! Then I can ask her mother how Radha is feeling about her illness?

VI. Discussion of the students' speaking sample

In the above example1, teacher shows no interest in Mr. Ajay's message; rather she/he focuses on the language the student uses to respond. The sad thing is that Mr. Ajay is himself almost certainly a veteran of such routinised exchanges and he realizes what the 'rules' are even before he speaks. By now he would probably even get shock if the teacher has shown any interest in his weekend activities for their own sake. What do we call this? Doesn't this happen in your class? This kind of exchange is not communication. In the classroom it is simply a pretext for learners to put their language up for scrutiny and for teachers to correct it. Outside the classroom the teachers' responses would vary probably and are seen as socially unacceptable. And yet many of the teachers call our classrooms communicative.

This kind of proposition could lead to contradiction that Mr. Ajay's teacher is 'listening' to him in a way, but this is far from the kind of listening which is typical of the give and take of real life conversation. What is most important; is correcting the grammar mistakes of the students in front of the class? or giving space for listening skills and encouraging students to participate in sharing /talking their weekend experiences in front of everybody. A teacher who is inclined to listen sets the tone for the development of a listening culture in the classroom. If the teacher values what the students talk, the students are far more likely to listen actively to him/her and, importantly to each other. When this is achieved in the class, the rewards are quickly evident in terms of student motivation and participation. It's a well known fact that “You are not really listening to me” feeling. Why should the teachers inflict it on learners in a classroom?

Example 2 appears to be a very casual conversation between a daughter and a mother. Interestingly, here in this context, daughter tries to know all the relevant information regarding the work her mother is going to do for the weekend. A teacher who has been a student in the past knows that there are different levels of involvement in any learning experience. Through research studies by Morgan and Saxton (1987) five degrees of involvement have been identified, namely; 1) interest: *being curious about what is presented*, 2) engaging: *wanting to be, and being involved in the task*, 3) committing: *developing a sense of responsibility towards the task*, 4) Internalizing: *merging objective concepts (the task or what is to be learned) with subjective experience (what is already owned) resulting in understanding and therefore ownership, of new ideas*, 5) interpreting: *wanting and needing to communicate that understanding others*. These levels of involvement are referred to as '**Taxonomy of Personal Engagement**'

VII. Teacher Implications

From the above discussion it is evident that language teachers need to look at their practices and find ways of promoting student talk almost as an educational imperative in the regular classrooms. Teachers should try and apply the following practices in the classroom:

- ❖ *It is imperative that teacher's should pay individual attention to "students talk" especially focusing on 'what they say' as well as 'how they say it'.*
- ❖ *Promote a listening culture in the classrooms.*
- ❖ *Ask more challenging question to engage higher order thinking skills and be ready to accept unexpected answers.*
- ❖ *Allow silence and time for thought.*
- ❖ *Challenge and changes stultifying routines such as the three stage classroom exchange.*
- ❖ *Plan, and build in meaningful tasks to encourage productive talk.*
- ❖ *Encourage students to ask questions, initiate talk and to seek for meaning*
- ❖ *Involve students in decision-making*
- ❖ *Help learners to "find a voice in English"*

VIII. Conclusion

As every child in the home tries to know many things by asking his/her parents through questions, it's believed that art of questioning attitude is the right path. English teachers should encourage the students to develop their communication skills. Less talk by teachers and more talk by the students in the classroom but in an organized manner, without giving away the purpose of academics. The ultimate purpose of any English course is to achieve good communication skills in students; it has to be brought into reality by the teachers. It's not just filling up the regular class with pre-planned lesson stuff, rather more practical and needful time spending.

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