

## On the English Teacher's Classroom Language

Zhen Zhou

Foreign Language School, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

Correspondence: Zhen Zhou, Foreign Language School, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

Corresponding Author: Zhen Zhou

**ABSTRACT-** The classroom language is the most basic skill of teachers in English class and is also the main tool for teachers to impart knowledge. Targeted, aesthetic, emotional and inspiring teacher's professional language plays an extremely important role in teaching activities. The article first explores the theoretical foundation of the teacher's classroom language, and then analyzes the importance of proper English teacher's classroom language, expounds on the problems existing in the English teaching, puts forward some principles guiding English teaching, and finally raises some strategies to improve the teachers' classroom language using level in order to improve teacher's professional level and further enhance the teaching efficiency of English teaching.

**KEY WORDS**—teacher's classroom language, language input theory, relevance theory, accuracy, encouraging

---

Date of Submission: 09-08-2018

Date of acceptance: 24-08-2018

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers' classroom language refers to the total of teachers' language output in class. Every syllable and every sentence that the teacher says in the classroom serves the goal of teaching in the efficient English teaching. The correct use of English classroom teaching language to organize teaching is beneficial to the creation and use of English environment for students, to stimulate students' interest in learning English and to improve the efficiency of English classroom teaching (Zhu, 2008; Chen, 2013; Qian, 2014; Yang, 2014; Zhang, 2016; Tian, 2017) "Junior high school English curriculum standard of China" (2011 Edition) clearly points out that whether the use of teacher's classroom teaching language is scientific and appropriate directly affects the orderly progress of classroom teaching, affects the initiative of the students, and ultimately determines the success or failure of the classroom teaching. Shi (2013) points out that the English teaching in classroom is an important part of second language learners' acquisition, and the instruction the teacher uses is the main factor which influences students' communicative competence.

### 1. Theoretical Foundation

#### 1.1 Language Input Theory

Language Input Theory focuses on language acquisition process. Krashen believes that only when the learner comes into contact with "comprehensible input", which is slightly higher than the second language input of his existing language skills, can he focus on the understanding of meaning or information rather than form. According to this hypothesis, as long as students meet the words which can be fully understood, language acquisition is a kind of inevitable outcome. Enough input refers to providing enough language materials for learners. Therefore, teacher's classroom language becomes a main source of language input. In this sense, the quality and quantity of teachers' instructions is crucial for students to acquire the English language.

#### 1.2 Relevance Theory

The relevance theory holds that the hearer can find the best relevance between the utterance and hypothesis of context by means of the information in the cognitive context, and infer the implication of the context through inference, and finally achieve the contextual effect and achieve the success of communication. Relevance theory also holds that communication is not based on cooperative criteria. In order to make communication successful, the only common goal of the speaker and the listener is to understand and be understood by the other. In the English classroom teaching, the instructions the teacher selects need to be relevant in order to effectively meet the communicative need. In this way, the teacher's words cannot be arbitrary and they must be carefully chosen with sufficient contextual relevance. Therefore English teachers need to take such necessary factors into consideration as discourse expression, students' cognitive language environment, students' personality and so on.

## **II. IMPORTANCE OF PROPER ENGLISH TEACHER'S CLASSROOM LANGUAGE**

### **2.1 An important teaching resource**

The English teacher's classroom language is not only the target language of classroom teaching, but also a medium language for teacher-student interaction. For most students, an important source of the language input is from teachers. When teachers give English instructions, they are actually an important part of students' English language input. And creating a great language learning environment is an essential part for students to learn English. However, at present, in most schools of China, English teachers usually adopt the traditional grammar translation teaching method and neglect English communication. So students lack English communicative environment, and students' language input is mostly obtained by reading books or doing a lot of exercises. English teaching language can improve students' listening ability and communicative ability. The proper use of classroom language can not only enable students to get a certain number of language input, but also enable students to learn living language, stimulate students' interaction, and generate rich language resources for students.

### **2.2 To help students build up positive attitude toward English study**

The proper use of classroom language can create relaxing classroom atmosphere and encourage students to study. It is well known that the teacher's vivid language can make the classroom atmosphere active and lively. When there is a difficult language point or students develop a fear of difficulties, because the teacher uses the appropriate language to encourage students, the tension atmosphere in the classroom will dissipate and the students will work hard to learn again. In this learning environment, students can have more chances to practice and know the mistakes they make. In addition, it is found that students become more enthusiastic to the English learning in an active learning environment created by a teacher who correctly uses the classroom language. When a student makes a mistake, the language encouraged by the teacher can make the dull and awkward class relaxing again.

## **III. PROBLEMS WITH ENGLISH TEACHER'S CLASSROOM LANGUAGE**

It is no doubt that during these four decades after reform and opening-up policy, China's English teaching has experienced a series of wonderful reforms and already made great achievements, and a great many talents who have a good command of English has been turned out. However, there still exist many problems in the English teaching, and one of the typical problems is with teacher's classroom English language.

### **3.1 Teacher dominating the English class**

For a long time, most of the students' English learning is based on the written English test. In the process of many years of English learning, most teachers dominate the English class and mainly teach students vocabulary and grammar structure using a lot Chinese and ignore the spoken language teaching. It is found that Chinese teachers' discourse in teaching occupies 70% to 90% of class time. The number of students who can use English fluently to communicate is small. "Dumb" English has increasingly become the biggest obstacle to learn English. Therefore, teachers should put more focus on helping students improve students' comprehensive skills in English use through classroom English language.

### **3.2 Many English teachers lacking a good command of English expressing skills**

As a matter of fact, there is no qualification standard for an English teacher's oral English level although at present, there are TEM4 and TEM8 certification threshold in China for English majors which have no oral English requirement. Besides, when working as a teacher, many teachers' English level degrades as they lack English speaking desire and environment. Thus many English teachers use improper languages to teach students English. Most of the time, the class language is either English-Chinese or Chinese, and this will not improve the students' oral ability at all. Maybe the teachers' English pronunciation and intonation are poor and they cannot pronounce accurately or speak English fluently and idiomatically. Teachers' confusing spoken English will directly affect students' ability of spoken English.

### **3.3 Chinese-style thinking habits**

Many English teachers affected by the Chinese negative transfer use English with Chinese-style thinking and lack authentic English expressing skills, resulting in many expressing mistakes. Its main feature is to translate the expression directly from Chinese into English. For example, when a student is given a card to coordinate with the teaching activity, the teacher can easily blurt out the sentence "Give you!" instead of "Here you are!"; while waiting for the children to raise their hands to answer questions, many teachers will say, "I very want you to try!", "Who can?" instead of "Will you have a try?"; when the teacher refuses the request from the students, he will say, "I think I can't." instead of "Sorry, I'm afraid I couldn't."

### **3.4 Frequent use of English mantra**

The mantra is a common problem in the teacher's classroom language. Many teachers have the mantra habit without realizing it and many keep the habit all though their teaching career. For example, many teachers like to use such mantras as "so.../ and...and...and... yeah... / um.../ guys.../ clear? /Pay attention! /Good! / You know.../ Well..." for quite many times in class. The mantra sounds wordy and tires the students and also wastes the class time which influences the teaching effect. After a class, the teacher's mantra is so impressive that it can easily lead the students to unconsciously follow suit.

### **3.5 Unchanging and single expression**

Regarding the single expression, some of them are reflected in the lack of diversified expressions of teachers in the teaching steps; a typical part is mainly reflected in the teacher evaluation terms. When the students answer the teacher's question, the teacher uses "Good! / Very good!" to replace all the motivational evaluations. Actually there are a great many ways to inspire students according to different situations, for example, "cool, nice, fine, awesome, gorgeous, brilliant, fantastic, terrific" and so on. When the teacher and the students greet each other, the language form is often very monotonous, which is also a template "Teacher: Good morning, boys and girls! How are you? Student: Fine, thank you! And you?" or "Are you happy today? Yes, I am." In fact, there are a mountain of greeting ways between the teacher and students, for example, a very simple and relaxing greeting way is as follows "Morning, boys and girls!" As we know, language is profound and flexible; the teacher should often vary the teaching language and let students be exposed to colorful and dynamic English.

### **3.6 General evaluation language**

When teachers give individual students an evaluation in the classroom, the words often deviate from objectivity and are too exaggerated. When students answer non-challenging questions correctly, teachers are particularly excited to comment "Perfect! / You are clever!" English teaching language encourages encouragement and protects children's enthusiasm. However, if the teacher only praises the student ignoring the mistake when the student actually makes a mistake, it will only be skipped after blind encouragement, which is not conducive to the progress of the students. Teachers must grasp the principle of encouragement and must not be biased towards objectivity. Hence the evaluation language should not only be soft and encouraging, but also should point out the mistake indirectly and skillfully.

## **IV. PRINCIPLES OF ENGLISH CLASSROOM LANGUAGE**

### **4.1 Accuracy**

The teacher's language has a great demonstration to the students and has a subtle influence on the students, so his language should be accurate and serves as a good language model and resource. As a teacher, he cannot use every sentence casually and carelessly in class. He must ensure the accuracy of every sentence uttered in the classroom. The pronunciation and intonation is accurate, and word choice is accurate.

### **4.2 Brevity**

Generally speaking, the English teacher's classroom language should be simple and clear. The teacher's classroom language is oral English rather than formal written English and it can facilitate students' oral English skill enhancement. When teachers communicate with students, a clear and simple expressing way can smoothen and strengthen the communication. For example, "Now, do it!" is better than "Now, you do the task I set for you". "Finished?" is better than "Have you all finished it?" "Agree?" is much better than "Do you all agree with her?" "Got it?" is better than "Have you got it?"

### **4.3 Acceptability**

The English teacher's classroom language depends on the characteristics of students which should be easy to accept and understand. Specifically, primary school English teachers' teaching language should be much simpler but with more body language aid. If teachers blindly pursue language display, the classroom language cannot serve our teaching well and becomes the biggest stumbling block in our teaching. Some simple sentences and even words can be put into students' lower grades, but with the growth of grades, the input difficulty can be increased: from simple expressions to more advanced expressions.

### **4.4 Flexibility**

The teachers' language should be flexible and diverse and the teacher should try their best to let students feel the profoundness and extensiveness of English language. Language is flowing with many changes, and it is not stiff and fixed. However, on the basis of accuracy, language flexibility and diversity should be considered, which plays an important role in promoting students' language ability. The teacher should enhance

their own oral English expressing ability and vary their expressing ways and supply a beautiful picture of English language, which can also erase many students' concept of boring rote learning way and stimulate students' learning interest.

#### **4.5 All English teaching**

It is perfectly natural for English teachers to prepare lessons and give lessons in English. It is one of the ideals of English education that all English teachers are proficient in using English for classroom teaching. There are two main reasons for the implementation of the whole English teaching. On the one hand, the opportunities for students to contact English after class are limited. Teachers should make use of the classroom as much as possible to provide students with the opportunity to be exposed to English, make them understand and use English. On the other hand, the English teaching can also promote the improvement of the professional quality of the English teachers. Therefore, all English teaching should be actively advocated.

### **V. STRATEGIES OF IMPROVING ENGLISH TEACHER'S CLASSROOM LANGUAGE USING LEVEL**

#### **5.1 Making teacher's classroom language communicative**

On the one hand, the daily life language should replace the formal written language so as to teach students how to use English instead of merely teaching English language knowledge. For example, "Raise your hand please?" is simplified as "Hands up, please!" "Do you understand me?" is shortened to "Clear? /Make sense? /Are you with me?" Simple and clear language is easy for students to understand and can save class time as well. On the other hand, the language with hard command tone in classroom language changes into an interactive tone between teachers and students. This feature is a huge change, which can make the classroom "warm", the harmonious and close relationship between teachers and students can also enliven the class atmosphere. For example, "Would you please close your books?" It not only makes students feel willing to do this, but also makes them memorize the life sentence patterns like "Would you please..." painlessly and naturally.

#### **5.2 All English teaching avoiding Chinese style English**

The teacher's language is a valuable source of language input for students. In China, it is a great pity that not only in the primary schools, but also in universities, English teachers teach using a lot of Chinese, which cannot provide a good learning environment for students' language imitation and communication. The teacher should improve their professional abilities and strive for correct, authentic teaching language. Teachers themselves ought to pay attention to contact, and absorb normalized classroom language. Besides, teachers should identify similarities and differences between their mother tongue and English, avoid the influence of mother tongue, and stick to the principle of using English as much as possible and strive for the accuracy and fluency of language in the expression of ideas.

#### **5.3 Considering students' actual acceptable level**

Confucius put forward the theory of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude 2000 years ago in China. Teachers should understand the students' actual needs, and the difficulty of teachers' language should be slightly higher than the students' language level, so that the students can be motivated and improved. Especially in explaining, analyzing new words, phrases or sentences, teachers should use English with gradual increasing difficulty according to the actual situation, and apply the knowledge learned by students to the teaching of new knowledge as far as possible. Furthermore, teachers should fully explore the hidden topics in the textbooks, stimulate students to actively think, give full play to students' imagination space, expand students' thinking and create opportunities for communication between teachers and students.

#### **5.4 Enlivening the teaching language**

The teaching language should be vivid and humorous, which can create a relaxing, friendly, democratic and inspiring learning atmosphere. Teachers should pay attention to the use of funny and vivid class language. The humorous classroom language is a lubricant of English teaching, which is an effective way to arouse the classroom atmosphere and regulate the emotion of teachers and students. It has been proved that in the classroom, the humorous oral English can make classroom atmosphere active, and the teachers with sense of humor and wit are more easily to achieve the effective control of classroom teaching, and be more adept in alleviating the tension in the classroom. Thus, teachers should frequently employ lively, humorous language instead of very serious, stern language so as to improve the teaching efficiency.

#### **5.5 Using "positive language" to encourage students**

Tagore once remarked that it is not the blow of the hammer, but the song and dance of the water that

makes the pebble perfect. Teachers can utilize positive expressions to encourage students, and try to avoid the negative language in English classroom. For example, teachers can use such words as “excellent, wonderful, well done, very good, good job, awesome” and other commendatory words to evaluate students, which is conducive to arousing students' interest and enthusiasm in classroom activities. Teachers should praise and appreciate their students, tell them how great they are, how excellent their performance is, and how fantastic they could be. The fact will tell us how powerful teachers' praise can work sooner or later. Teachers should never be stingy with their praise.

#### **5.6 Enriching and varying the teaching language**

English teachers' classroom language should be varied, colorful, thought-provoking and beautiful. English teachers should not repeat some expressions all the time and should change their expression from time to time to attract students. To avoid boredom and drear, teachers can vary their expression just like a fresh air for students to breath. For example, if you greet your student, you can say in other ways instead of just saying “Hello!” You can start from a simple question like “What's up?” or “How are you doing?” Teachers can greet students in a more native way. And if they greet you with “How are you?” Your answer can be something else other than “I am fine, thank you, and you?” You could say “Quite good!” And if you do not feel so well, you could answer, “If you must know, I feel terrible.” or “Actually I'm a bit under the weather.” or in some easier way like “I'm hanging on.” or “Been better.” or “Mustn't grumble.” and so on.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Teacher's discourse is an important part of English classroom. In English classroom teaching activities, teachers' ability to use language flexibly and effectively is one of the key factors to achieve the teaching objectives. Based on analyzing the principle and problems of teacher's classroom language, the article puts forward such strategies as follows, making teacher's classroom language communicative, avoiding Chinese style English, considering students' actual acceptable level, and enlivening the teaching language, using “positive language” to encourage students and enriching and varying the teaching language. English teachers should make the classroom language artistic, and activate the classroom atmosphere, so as to arouse the students' interest in learning, promote the classroom teaching to improve the teaching quality of the English class.

## **VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This study was financially supported by "11531" Construction Project of Nanchang Normal University of China (English Language and Literature Discipline Construction).

## **REFERENCES**

- [1]. A. G. Yang, The present situation of junior middle school English classroom language and effective classroom language exploration. *New Curriculum Learning*, (10), 2014, 51-55.
- [2]. D. Y. Zhang, Exploring the classroom language of primary school English teachers. *English Teacher*. (18), 2016, 102-104.
- [3]. D. Krashen, Stephen, Principles and practice in second language acquisition, Oxford: Pergamon Press Inc, 1982. Shi, S. J. Junior English teacher's classroom language analysis. *New curriculum*, 2013 (9).
- [4]. L. M. Zhu, On the rational use of classroom language in English teaching. *English Square: Academic Research*, (5), 2008, 148-149. Yang Angen. The present situation of junior middle school English classroom language and effective classroom language exploration. *New Curriculum Learning*: 2014 (10):51-55.
- [5]. L. N. Qian, Classification and analysis of foreign language teachers' classroom discourse. *Overseas English*, (16), 2014, 240-241.
- [6]. R. J. Tian, A study of English classroom language from the perspective of politeness principle. *Educational Sector: Higher Education Research*, (11), 2017, 62-63.
- [7]. S. J. Shi, Analysis of Junior English teacher's classroom language. *New Curriculum*, (9), 2013, 18-22.
- [8]. Y. P. Chen, The positive role of classroom language in junior middle school English teaching, *English Plaza: Academic Research Study*, (4), 2014, 165-165.