

# The Main Problems and Countermeasures of English Classroom Talk

Bojie Qian

Wuhan Media and Communications College of Huazhong Normal University, 430205 Wuhan Hubei, China

**Abstract.** English classroom talk is one of the effective media for knowledge transfer in the English classroom, and how to use it effectively is a problem worth discussing. This article summarizes the main problems of English classroom talk through the analysis of its characteristics, and finally puts forward targeted countermeasures.

**Keywords.** classroom talk; characteristics; problems; countermeasures

## 1 The basic definition and characteristics of English Classroom talk

### 1.1 The basic definition of English Classroom talk

The so-called classroom talk of English teacher is also known as the teacher-type language which, in short, refers to what the English teacher says in a second language learning classroom to learners. Classroom talk of English teacher is not only a tool for teachers to carry out the teaching plan, but also an important source of language input for students. In evaluation of classroom talk, Nunan said: "It plays a vital role in the organization of classroom teaching and learners' language learning process".

### 1.2 The basic characteristics of English Classroom talk

Firstly, classroom questioning is the outstanding characteristic of English classroom talk. In the English classroom talk, questioning accounts for a considerable proportion. By consulting some senior English teachers and watching English teaching example videos, the author was informed that seventy percent of classroom talk is in such a process: The teacher asks the students, specifies a student to answer, the students answer the questions, and then the teacher will provide a certain feedback. Therefore, classroom questioning has always been an important means in English classroom teaching. Classroom questioning is playing an increasingly important role, especially in today's popular teaching mode with the theme of "learner-centered".

Second, in the classroom talk of English teacher, there is a considerable part of the voice, vocabulary, syntax, talk that will be re-processed according to demand. For example, deliberate prolong stop or slow down

in the voice, and more clear vowel; as well as extensive use of basic words, more use of simple sentence, less use of clauses, more use of the first person, etc. in the vocabulary and syntax.

Thirdly, English classroom talk is a bridge to realize the English classroom communication. As everyone knows, the classroom communication can maximally provide comprehensible language input for the learners, and both of teachers and learners can use effective communication strategies to make their language understood by others.

Fourthly, the use of English teachers' classroom talk is mainly reflected in the explanation of talk, the imparting of vocabulary and grammar and various comments on exercises. Influenced by the form of class and English teachers' personality, cohesion between organization and links of classroom activities will result in a certain difference in the amount of use of classroom talk, therefore imperative type of the classroom behavior order is increasingly transformed into the advising type.

## 2 Role of English classroom talk and the main problems existing in current use, as well as the practice of research and statistical analysis

### 2.1 Role of English classroom talk and the main problems existing in current use

The talk of teacher in English class plays a distinctly exemplary role, and also a specific application of leading questions, classroom instruction feedback, summary, evaluation and other the specific teaching links for teachers. Only the teachers that are skilled in and have a proper use of this teaching tool can provide effective language input for language learners and promote mutual devel-

opment of both teachers and students and the improvement of teaching quality. In the thirty-third annual meeting of the International Association of English teachers in 1999, Steven Walsh made a speech in the theme of "Asking the right question: Teacher talk and learner output". He thought that the biggest different of teaching in foreign language classroom and other classrooms is that language is not only the objective of learning, but also the medium of teaching.

Apart from being a tool for teacher to implement the teaching plan, English teacher talk is also the main source of language input. In the English classroom, teachers should use a lot of classroom language to arrange the classroom teaching. The presentation of knowledge, the specific organization and implementation of explanation of teaching activities, exchange among teachers and students, revision feedback, evaluation, detection and whether they can fully understand and efficiently use the English classroom talk will directly affect the effectiveness of classroom teaching of English. Hunan points out that the teacher talk plays a crucial role in the organization of classroom teaching and in the learning process for learners. Krashen believes that comprehensible language input is the important conditions for second language learning.

Output quality of teachers talk in English classroom will directly influence the improvement of students' scores. Teacher talk is like the bridge that provides comprehensible input for the learners, and is also an important way of language input for them. Former Soviet educator Ma Caren Co said: The same teaching method may cause a twenty-times difference due to the language barrier. Johnson points out that teachers mainly use language as a way to control everything going on in the classroom. While Hakansson points out that the quantity and quality of teacher talk may influence and even determine the success of classroom teaching.

To sum up, English teachers' classroom talk itself is the important teaching resources, The proper use of classroom talk will be related to whether the students can obtain the corresponding amount of language input in the limited time of classroom teaching, and it can also stimulate the students' interests of interaction in teaching, by which they will obtain fresh English language knowledge.

Through years of frontline teaching practice, classroom observation and students interviews, the author found that the classroom talks of many English teachers, in varying degrees, were not conducive to the formation of the students' development and even hinder their interests in language learning and basic abilities. For example, some teachers don't use any English to organize teaching in English class. Some teachers have many mistakes in using classroom language, and some other teachers that have rich professional knowledge are too self-centered, not capable of using classroom talk adequately according to the actual situation of students.

In summary, the main problems in the current use of English classroom talk include:

**(1) The time that the teacher waits for students to answer questions after asking those questions is too short.**

As this article mentions first in the characteristics of English classroom talk, in the classroom talk of English teacher, questions accounted for a considerable proportion; As known from the teaching practice and by access to large amounts of data: The time that the teacher waits for students to answer questions after asking those questions is also important for the success of classroom teaching. This is because students need more time to process the questions of objective language.

Rowe (1974) mentioned that, in the classrooms he observed, the time that the teacher waited for a specified student to answer questions was less than two seconds. If the student couldn't answer for 3 seconds, the teacher would intervene. Therefore, he stressed that, when teachers do have the patience to wait for 3 to 5 seconds or longer, more students will be more involved in classroom activities.

**(2) Lack of communication between teachers and students.**

Over the years, the English Teaching in China has always been following the traditional teacher-centered classroom teaching model, and teachers talk has the absolute advantage in the classroom teaching. Although this kind of teaching mode is under reform, some teaching thinkings are ingrained. We need to be aware that, in the teacher-centered English classroom teaching, teacher talk usually takes up seventy percent or even ninety percent of classroom time. Students will have few opportunities to participate in classroom activities and express their opinions. The lack of communication between teachers and students hinders the effective training of language communicative abilities for students.

**(3) There are too many displaying questions but less referential questions in the process of classroom questioning.**

Classroom questioning of English teacher can be divided into two categories, namely the displaying questions and referential questions: Displaying questions belong to the informational questions. The questions are set too simply, and students just need to answer "Yes" or "No", which lacks extension and progression of levels; The referential questions belong to the creative questions. Referential questions can draw the attention of students and stimulate their English learning potential. At present, classroom questions for large proportion of English teachers in most of the third-degree or independent colleges are mostly the displaying questions. Most of the questions are reproductions of information, which are not conducive to the transmission of language information or to expansion of students' thinking.

**(4) Teachers' English level needs to be improved.**

Nowadays, in the institutions of higher learning, the vast majority of English teachers have not ever lived in English speaking countries, and lacked the opportunities to communicate with native speakers of English, so the English they said will be not idiomatic inevitably. Some teachers use Chinese-type English, and even some other teachers mainly use Chinese in the classroom, which greatly affects the quality of English Teaching.

**2.2 Practical investigation and statistical analysis of the main problems**

The author has designed 20 questions in the questionnaire for 50 students with respect to four aspects of the main issues surrounding the current relevant English classroom talk mentioned above in order to know the true opinions

of students. After the process of questionnaire, the author also conducted interviews on the part of the students that participated in the survey, and the survey data was analyzed by SPSS

The following data statistics are based on the answers of students to the questionnaire and the evaluation on three teachers, T1, T2 and T3:

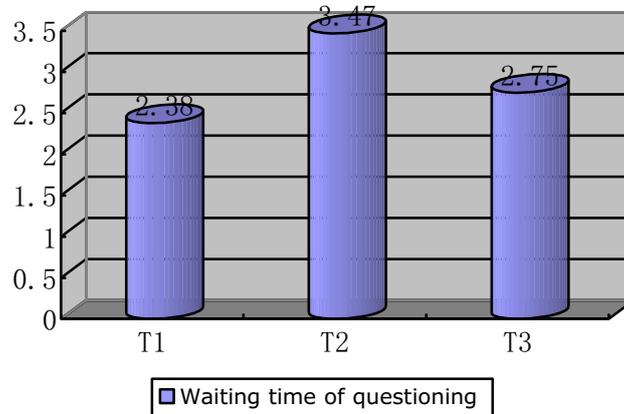


Figure 1. Waiting time of questioning for three teachers.

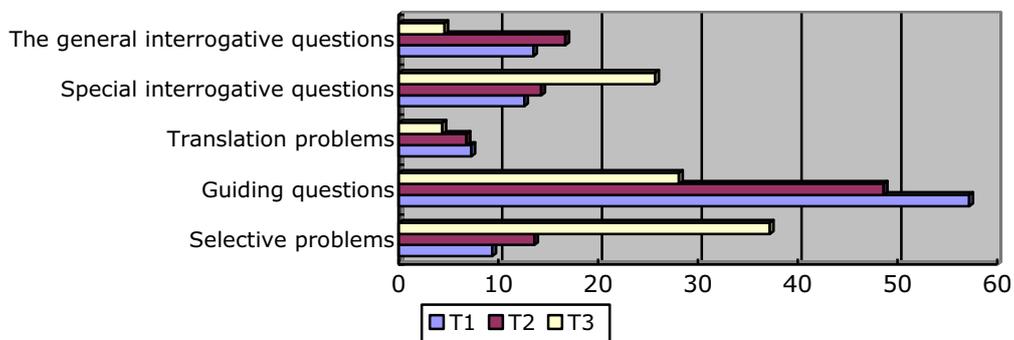


Figure 2. Proportion of classroom questioning types for three teachers.

It can be seen from the survey results that more than ninety percent of the students think that “The time that the teacher waits for students to answer questions after asking those questions is too short”. In terms of this issue with strong reaction, the author conducted interviews. The overall view of students is: Students need a relatively long time to process the question; but the time that the teacher waited for a specified student to answer questions was less than two seconds. The students think that if teachers do have the patience to wait for 3 to 5 seconds or longer, more students will be more involved in classroom activities. In addition, more than seventy percent of the students think that “There is a lack of communication between teachers and students”; More than sixty percent of the students think that “There are too many displaying questions but less referential questions in the process of classroom questioning”; For the problem of “Teachers’ English level needs to be improved”, more than thirty percent of the students did not fill in, while more than twenty percent of the students recognized. The above-mentioned practical investigation and statistical analysis

showed that the reflection and summary of main problems in the current English classroom talk are of a certain degree of universality.

**3. Countermeasures, practical application and analysis to solve the current problems in use of classroom talk**

**3.1. Countermeasures**

*3.1.1 Try to enrich the art effect of classroom language*

English teachers should employ specific speech, intonation, tone and voice speed to enrich the art effect of classroom language to attract students and let them have the sense of identity. Successful language learning requires the real and changing language environment. English teachers should try to merge the teaching goal and the interest of students, attract students with change in language to prevent the boring mechanical explanation.

They should use the effective input of teachers to guide the effective output of students. Therefore, a qualified English teacher shall especially deepen the understanding and use of classroom talk, constantly explore and optimize the classroom talk of teachers, so as to offer better service to students' all-round development.

### *3.1.2 Methods that constantly improve the classroom questioning*

In the English classroom discourse, questions accounted for a considerable proportion, therefore the methods that constantly improve the classroom questioning is an important stage where we solve current problems in classroom talk, such as the time that the teacher waits for students to answer questions. If teachers do have the patience to wait for 3 to 5 seconds or longer, more students will be more involved in classroom activities. Furthermore, the teachers shall attach great importance to the question distribution, prevent the questioning from happening in the front and middle part of the classroom, try to take into account the back and both sides of the classroom, especially without frequently asking questions to students that are preferred by teachers.

### *3.1.3 Practically grasp the difficulty coefficient*

English teachers' talk must meet the student's understanding ability, so as to be accepted by the student. Once beyond the practical ability of students, classroom talk will not promote teaching. Conversely, it will be the barrier of classroom teaching and language learning for students. If the students still cannot understand the talk even through the alternative expression of teachers, the English teachers shall use physical form, language pictures and other means to guide. Only to ensure that the teacher classroom talk is in controllable range can we achieve the effective goal.

### *3.1.4 Pay attention to improving the quality of English classroom talk*

Insist on using English in the teaching process to organize the basic teaching activity, and focus on the improvement of English teachers' talk quality. How to improve the quality of English teachers' classroom talk to make our classroom more vivid? First of all, English teachers shall need to improve their oral ability; secondly, the English teachers shall read more books to increase their cultural heritage; Thirdly, teaching English teachers should combine the teaching object, teaching content and reasonably-designed teaching stage, and try to make the teaching language concise, accurate and vivid. At the same time, English teachers should learn to find certain deficiencies of themselves in the language application in the use process, so as to produce the pressure and power to improve their language level.

### *3.1.5 Effectively adjust the amount of talk for teachers in classroom*

For years of interviewing quite a number of students in part of third-degree colleges in Wuhan and the college students there, the author knew that the students, to a certain extent, reject too much text explanation and exercises in class. They think in this way of teaching, the teachers "dominate the classroom talk", thus teachers and students lack the effective communication. Therefore, in English teaching, the teacher should guide the students to speak English, and actively carry out rich and colorful activities to avoid a monodrama. So teachers should effectively adjust the amount of talk for teachers in classroom to avoid too much one-way input.

## **3.2. Practical application and analysis**

For countermeasures to solve the current problems in use of classroom talk, the author conducted interviews on over 20 students, trying to know their true opinions. For example, the recognition of "methods that constantly improve the classroom questioning" accounts for almost ninety percent of the total number of the above investigation. Students generally think: The initial step to improve the way of classroom questioning is that the teachers should ask less displaying questions and more referential questions in the classroom; Referential questions can increase the language output of students in the classroom. If the teachers use the referential questions, the students can enhance the deep understanding of the content, and it is conducive to creative self-expression with learned knowledge for students and cultivation of their communicative competence in English. Therefore, the continuous improvement methods of classroom questioning shall mainly include that in the process of questioning, the proportion of referential questions that the teachers ask should be consciously increased. In a word, since the actual situation of each student is different, and the learning degree and growth environment will have an impact on them, so everyone's understanding of countermeasures related to "Try to enrich the art effect of classroom language", "Practically grasp the difficulty coefficient", "Pay attention to improving the quality of English classroom talk", "Effectively adjust the amount of talk for teachers in classroom" etc. will be different; However, almost all of the interviewed students said that they were very pleased in the exploration and practice of countermeasures to solve the current problems in use of classroom talk.

As an English teacher, the author has conducted a little amount of tests for students' voice, and consciously applied some countermeasures to solve the current problems in use of classroom talk in teaching practice. It is proved in teaching practice that they are effective. For example, in application of the countermeasure "Practically grasp the difficulty coefficient", we shall try to ensure the practicality of talk, and English teachers' talk must meet the student's understanding ability, so as to be accepted by the student; For the talk that the students shall understand but is temporarily incomprehensible, the teachers shall consider to use physical form or other means to guide them. In a word, only to ensure that the

teacher classroom talk is in controllable range can we achieve the effective goal.

#### 4 Conclusions

English teacher talk is teachers' effective tool for the implementation of classroom teaching, and also the major source of comprehensible input for students. As a disciplinary teaching tool, the talk of teacher in English class plays a distinctly exemplary role, and also a specific application of leading questions, classroom instruction feedback, summary, evaluation and other the specific teaching links for teachers. In the classroom of Intensive Reading, there are many quantity and quality problems in teacher's talk, which is, to some extent, far from the expectation of students on teacher's talk. So it is required to constantly improve the English teaching, and create more opportunities of communication for students in English class. Obviously, only the teachers that are skilled in and have a proper use of this teaching tool can provide effective language input for language learners and promote mutual development of both teachers and students and the improvement of teaching quality.

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