

# Teacher Talk and Language Output

Haiyan Wang

**Abstract**—As an important input and teaching media in foreign language teaching classes, teacher talk (TT) has a great effect on language output. This paper explores the problems related to teacher talk (TT) and language output in practical ELT (English Language Teaching) classroom and presents some suggestions for solving the problems which affect learner's effective language output.

**Keywords**—Second language acquisition, teacher talk, language output.

## I. INTRODUCTION

FOR a long time, there has been such a phenomenon in the second language acquisition in China: Learners have mastered a lot of words, be able to read English materials and get high marks in TOEFL, but they cannot apply them in communication or writing, namely the learners' ability of language output is far below the level. How to help foreign language learners to activate their input of language knowledge and improve their consciousness and ability of output is a big problem in front of us.

Compared with second language learners in western countries, Chinese foreign language learners depend more on classroom because of the lack of foreign language environment. Language classroom is different from other classroom because language is not only teaching medium but also teaching content. The proper use of teacher talk will have a positive or negative effect on learners' language output and communicative competence. The teacher should know how to use target language to teach target language. If used properly, teacher talk will not only lead and organize learners to participate in all kinds of communicative activities creating environment and chances of exchanging information and expressing ideas but also promote learners' language acquisition by communication and negotiation of meaning. So, it is necessary to study how teachers try to promote learners' language acquisition by their language of instruction.

## II. TEACHER TALK AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

According to Krashen's input hypothesis, he thinks that learners can acquire language unless sufficient comprehensible input is given [1]. The input should be meaning-centered instead of form-centered. As for successful language acquisition input, the most important thing is to provide language learners with as much comprehensible input as possible. In second language study, teacher talk is the most rich, most reliable source of comprehensible input. Long's interaction hypothesis emphasizes auxo-action negotiation of

meaning plays for language acquisition. Long thinks two-way communication is more favorable for language acquisition than one-way communication [2]. In two-way communication, when one party can't understand the other party, they will have chances to communicate with the other party to urge two parties to negotiate meaning and adjust interacturally with the aim of raising the intelligibility of language input.

Swain's output hypothesis holds that learners can reach native-speaker level only by meaningful language application. Besides necessary comprehensible language input, learners should have the opportunity to output language in order to make the accuracy and fluency of their language reach the level of native speakers [3]. Swain described the meaningful interactive activity learners participate as "being driven" so as to develop their language competence. So in the classroom, communication can provide learners with comprehensible language input up to the hilt. Both the teacher and the learner can adopt effective communicative strategy to make themselves understood by others. Negotiation of meaning is encouraged when problems emerge during communication and teachers should apply strategy to encourage learners to reorganize their language.

## III. FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHER TALK AND LEARNERS' LANGUAGE OUTPUT

Second language acquisition research provides detailed and accurate theoretical guidance for classroom teaching while classroom teaching creates practical field for the carrying out and formation of theoretical research. The two factors are interacted. But in teaching practice, many teachers neglect that their language (teacher talk) is the best language input for learners [4]. Even though some teachers notice the importance of teacher talk, they don't know how to combine this input source with learners' output by interactive classroom teaching effectively. The natural result is to produce low-quality language output with low-quality teacher talk and the teaching effect is not satisfactory. Which factors indeed lead to this phenomenon? In general, there are three factors which influence teacher talk and learners' language output.

### A. Not Fluent Oral English of English Teachers

This is the most obvious reason. In traditional English classroom teaching, teachers only lay emphasis on language knowledge without noticing the effect their language will influence learners all the time. Besides, Chinese English teaching is influenced by the change of national conditions deeply, making the mixed teaching staff with different levels, especially oral English level. Teaching development is not systematic. All this leads to low-quality of teacher talk. Some researchers have found those teachers who can speak oral English well, have received systematic training and adopt

learner-centered teaching mode is more popular with students and their teaching result is better. So it is very important to raise the quality of teacher talk in the English classroom which lays special emphasis on learners' listening and speaking ability and with the aim of developing learners' communicative competence.

#### *B. Not Realizing the Effect of Teacher Talk on Learners for Some Teachers*

This reason is important. For a long time, teachers pay much attention to such factors as the research of teaching method, the adoption of modes of instruction, the choice of teaching material and external environment. They don't pay enough attention to the teacher and the learner, not considering the importance of human factor. They don't know the language they adopt in the classroom is not only the tool of imparting knowledge but as a kind of input source, has direct influence on learners' language knowledge intake and language output. So some teachers are puzzled that their teaching result is inferior to others although they use the same teaching material as others, adopt the acknowledged effective teaching method and even spend more time and energy than others.

#### *C. The Lack of Meaningful Interactive Classroom Activity*

For some teachers, they only use such way of soliloquy as "This text introduces, explains and analyzes..." in their 50-minute classroom teaching. In the end, the interactive communication between the teacher and the learner is less and less. Even for the segment of asking questions, they have been accustomed to using display questions (the quizzer already know the answer to the question) instead of reference questions (the quizzer doesn't know the answer to the question). This way of teaching maybe can make classroom teaching proceed smoothly but deprive teachers and learners of the opportunity to communicate with each other virtually. In such kind of classroom, learners' questions, puzzles even their creative spark can't be settled and developed. So, teachers should carry out many kinds of bi-directional interactive teaching activities, raise more reference questions and provide more communication chances for students.

#### IV. RAISING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER TALK AND LEARNERS' LANGUAGE OUTPUT

As mentioned above, teacher talk and learner's language output are related to each other closely. Teacher talk should emphasize learners' language output, leading and assisting students to finish the learning process from language input to language output, making students be active and fully arousing the enthusiasm of students. It has turned out that teacher talk that emphasizes language output can get classroom to be sociable, communication actualized and make language use be more universal, deep-going, thus it ensure the magnitude of learners' investment, participation and applying in the process of language learning. From quantitative change to qualitative change, thus the goal of transforming knowledge into skill is achieved.

#### *A. Changing Concept and Emphasizing Output*

In English teaching syllabus, teaching program, curriculum provision and evaluation project, concept that emphasizes input but neglects output should be changed and output should be paid much attention to. According to cognitive psychologists, the knowledge that learners master includes not only declarative knowledge (grasping facts) but also procedural knowledge (how to do something) [5]. If people only pay attention to the former without attaching importance to the latter, they will get half the result with twice the effort. Learners will ultimately apply the knowledge to communicate with others, thus the importance of language output (speaking and writing) should be embodied concretely in the teaching syllabus, teaching program, curriculum provision and evaluation project. In all kinds of English teaching, it is an effective way to emphasize output, intensify oral and written output practice (especially oral output practice) in order to solve the problem of "high score but low ability, mute English and time consuming but low efficiency".

Then teachers' concept should also be changed and their awareness of output should be intensified. Now many foreign teachers' consciousness of English communication is too weak and their social ability in English is not high, so they will not or seldom organize students to communicate in English. Foreign teachers shouldn't speak of foreign language teaching reform orally, they should strengthen their own output consciousness and output ability, thus leading learners to enhance output consciousness and improve output ability [6].

#### *B. Making Language Naturalized*

Learners' everyday language input is not a few, but there is not much real language input with proper difficulty, enjoyment and high validity. As an important source of language input, teacher talk should raise its quality consciously. According to Krashen's "Input Hypothesis", learners' present level is "i" and "i+1" shows the language knowledge which is a little more than learners' present level [1]. Unless language input is "i+1", can learners understand language and acquire language at the same time. We can imagine that if learners receive the same teacher talk every day, it is not favorable for them to acquire language and output language.

In other words, if teachers blindly pursue the intelligibility of their talk, oversimplifying their language, learners will form the habit of depending teachers to simplifying difficult sentences for them instead of thinking by themselves. And once they get used to teachers' simplified talk, learners will be at a loss when they meet more difficult sentences during real communication and make them be embarrassed. At the same time, it is opposing to the rule of language study. We all know that learners are not passive receipts when they are learning a language. Learners creatively construct their language by applying LAD (Language Acquisition Device) [7]. So, teachers should follow the rule of language study and prepare for classroom teacher talk elaborately, offering learners language input with high validity and promoting them to acquire language.

### C. Increasing the Chance of Learners' Language Output

Teachers can excavate the contained chance in the classroom teaching in order to promote learners' high-quality language output by monitoring and reflecting on their own teaching language.

#### 1. Direct and Brief Error Correction

By direct and brief error correction, teachers can not only save time, making learners involved in conversation finish their talk smoothly, but also make other learners reap a lot without distracting listeners' attention. But if all the errors in learners' oral English are corrected, we can't say that the purpose of classroom activity is to promote the fluency of learners' oral English.

#### 2. Increasing the Tolerance of Learners' Response

It is a question for many language teachers to make students answer teachers' questions actively. Students keep silent in the classroom. It is hard to think that teachers themselves are the main reason that makes students be silent, such as teachers' intolerance of students' silence. So teachers need some successful strategies of communicative classroom teaching, such as delaying waiting time, improving teachers' asking skills, accepting all kinds of answers, group cooperation, partner support and meaning-centered.

#### 3. Effective Evaluation Method

The way teachers evaluate students' answer will have a rather great effect on their learning motivation and anxiety state. So teachers should pay attention to applying suitable evaluation method at any time, with encouragement and enlightenment as the starting point, triggering the highest learners' learning motivation and dropping the lowest learners' anxiety state.

Besides, in foreign language classroom, teachers should encourage students to output language and encourage them to evaluate their own language output, paying attention to developing learners' consciousness of linguistic forms and making them notice their language problem. By making hypothesis testing of the structure and the meaning of target language, learners should focus their attention to their own language output, noticing the difference between their own language output and target language with the aim of finding their own shortcomings and knowing from which aspect can they improve their own language by studying target language further. Also, learners should be initiative to find out relevant information from teacher talk. This process is not only self-evaluation process but also acquisition process.

### V. CONCLUSION

In second language acquisition, teacher talk is the most abundant and the most reliable source of comprehensible input and it is closely related to learners' language output. And the process of language output while evaluating interlanguage is the process of acquisition. Based on that, this paper probes into the factors influencing teacher talk and learners' language output and how to improve the quality of them.

### REFERENCES

- [1] S. D. Krashen, *The Input Hypothesis: Issues And Implications*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1985.
- [2] M. Long, *The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition*. In Ritchie, William; Bhatia, Tej. *Handbook of second language acquisition*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996.
- [3] M. Swain, *Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development*. S. Gass & C. Madden, *Input in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1985.
- [4] D. Osborne, "Teacher talk: A sociolinguistic variable," *English Teaching Forum*, vol. 199, pp. 10-12, 1999
- [5] S. J. Derry, *Learning strategies for acquiring useful knowledge*. In B. F. Jones & L. Idol (Eds.), *Dimensions of thinking and cognitive instruction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990.
- [6] H. Y. Wang, "On the Relationship between Language Output and Second Language Acquisition," *International Journal of Social, Human Science and Engineering*, vol. 8, pp. 831-833, 2014.
- [7] N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965.

**Haiyan Wang** received the MA degree in English Linguistics and Literature from Liaoning Normal University, Dalian, Liaoning Province, China, in 2005. Currently, she is working at College of Foreign Languages of Qingdao University of Science and Technology. Her research interests include linguistics, second language acquisition and language and culture.