

A GOOD TEACHER OF EFL SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASS

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Teacher's part in foreign language learning is obviously central. In Asian contexts, where learners are stereotyped as 'less autonomous', teachers even become vital – an important source of language input. They, in this case, are also expected to serve as a good linguistic model for the learners. This paper criticizes the use of language other than English by the teacher in the practice of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in the writer's local context of EFL learning. The writer argues that there is no compromise for a foreign language teacher to speak the native tongue in the class.

Many teachers of English at all levels speak English in portion smaller than the native language of the students. Some say they do so because the students cannot catch ideas when English is used as the language of instruction. Principally speaking, English should be used by the teacher since the very first time the learners make contact with it. Many ways can help the learners' understanding of the target language use, e.g. repetition, speech speed reduction, rephrasing, and gestures. The use of the first language in teaching English can bring about some logical consequences such as learner's dependence upon the source rather than target language, poor attention to his/her speech, inadequate ear training, and less challenge. In the meanwhile, the writer is to some extent suspicious of the teachers' self-confidence crisis in the target language use or their poor command of spoken English.

In relation to the ideas briefly elaborated above it is necessary that EFL teachers always improve both their ability in speaking English and insights into the development of second/foreign language pedagogy.

Introduction

In most cases, to me there is only little space for compromise that at work a foreign language teacher speaks the home language of the students. There are some sound reasons behind this opinion. Unfortunately, however, there are many teachers of EFL who still speak in a language other than English in the practice of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in the writer's work place environment. In the sections that follow the writer puts forward some arguments and offer solutions to the problems that potentially appear when EFL teachers speak English in the class.

The Necessity of Teacher's EFL Speech

Teacher plays a key role in foreign language learning settings. His existence is even more crucial in Asian contexts, where learners are stereotyped as 'less autonomous' (Littlewood 1999 and many others, as cited in Lamb 2004 at <http://www.multilingual-matter.net/>). In the case of Asian learners of EFL, teachers may become one of the main sources of language input. The amount of language input is limited in various contexts. Beyond the classroom, where individuals spend most of the time, learners do not make contact with the second/foreign language. Regardless of the roles that a professional teacher of EFL can serve in the class (including the ones that can promote learning autonomy) and examples of successful EFL individual learners, a teacher of EFL should speak the foreign language in the class.

Anyway, is it possible to speak in English to young learners at, say, for instance, primary level or even lower ones? Surely, it is. It depends on the teaching techniques used or learning experience provided. Most children like singing and listening to songs. Children are fond of playing games. Children like these simple things. Teaching them English through those fun-based activities enables communication in the second language to work. Imagine working with kindergarten or elementary school children. Due to limited linguistic repertoire it is hard to teach them grammar in isolation, even though the explanation is given in the first language of classroom pupils. It is also the reason why some prominent approaches to second/foreign language teaching do not support the use of native language in early levels (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

When an EFL teacher speaks English in the class, he/she gives no choice in the language the students will use in the class communication. In other words, when the teacher speaks English, he prevents the students from devaluing the target language as a vehicle for communication and minimizes the students' dependence upon their first language. But, what happen if students remain to speak their home language? Just let it be. It does not seem to take too long. When the teacher of EFL is persistent with his/her way the students will be forced to accept the use of second/foreign language in his speech, as normally they will be worried to miss possible points conveyed in the teacher's speech.

In the eyes of EFL students, teacher is perceived to have experienced adequate training in the use of the foreign language he/she teaches. If the EFL teacher speaks the first language of the students, to some students this may mean the teacher has no good command of spoken English (even when it is felt impossible for the teacher to express with second language words). This may lead to students' neglect of their teacher. Presumably, whether it touches teacher's prestige problem or not, the students become reluctant to pay attention due to less challenge, and even unnecessary noise will possibly arise.

Language is learned in socially interactive settings and that children construct their linguistic systems from the language they hear from adults and more capable peers (Tabors & Snow in Genesee 1994: 122). A good language teacher is a good speaker of the language he/she teaches. Teacher's professional English ability and beautiful pronunciation spoken during the class will be not only good exposure but also good linguistic model to their students the students. In addition, there is a possibility that students, at least to a small number, want to be like him/her in such a matter. After all, improved outcomes in foreign language classrooms are more likely to occur if the amount of input in the second language in class is increased substantively. Teacher's speech in English is language input to the students. The teacher's use of language other than English in EFL teaching will only sacrifice valuable opportunities for the target language use. In addition, when the teacher of EFL speaks a language other than English, the textbook and other written materials then become the only language source in the classroom because listening-to-recording activities (if any) are normally limited. This does not necessarily mean that teacher should speak all the time or dominates classroom interaction and communication. The teacher speaks up only when he/she considers it is teacher effective talk time, e.g. when giving instructions or offering correction and feedback.

The arguments noted above suggest that it is of great value for teachers of EFL to speak the foreign language in the classroom management and, therefore, EFL teacher's competence as well as performance in the language he/she teaches is a crucial thing. Unfortunately, many teachers of English especially those at secondary classrooms speak English in portion smaller (if they do) than the home language(s) especially Indonesian. Some say students do not understand their words when they use English as the language of instruction. This might be true. However, the writer is to some extent suspicious of the teachers' self-confidence crisis in the target language use or their poor command of spoken English and/or ignorance of way-outs.

English as the Classroom Language of EFL Teachers

What will a teacher of EFL do when he/she finds it impossible to speak English in the class? Students might reject the teacher speaking in English because the teacher's speech is hard to understand. Why, then, is his speech hard to understand? Some causal factors are possible. One possible factor is the teacher speaks too fast. Another possibility deals with the teacher's speech, which is not accurate. His language may also be too "high" or complicated to the students' level. Above all, troubles might be rooted from the speech content (e.g. containing new concepts) or irregularity of target language use.

Many ways associated with linguistics and behaviors can help learners understand the teacher's use of EFL. When the teacher considers the students do not positively respond him speaking EFL because he speaks too fast, he can initiate such a question as "Do I speak too fast?", "Shall I speak more slowly?", or, if they still show signs of not understanding, he can repeat what he was just saying at a lower speed level. When the students seem reluctant to pay attention to the teacher speaking English and when this, as he does believe, is because of his speech inaccuracy or improper language level, he may try to rephrase his words. By this technique one tries to ask or say the same thing in different ways. In the parts that follow some techniques that result in a greater focus on meaning and understanding the second language without recourse to translation (shift to source language) are discussed.

Rephrasing can be thought of as a paralleling the questioning downward technique. Questioning downwards technique can be best used with both reading and listening comprehension. It is a way of helping students to reach the textual meanings through establishing what students might already know about the topic. For example, in a short piece of reading text on seasoning food, it is suggested that novices wanting to use spices and herbs in cooking their food should underseason the food. The following dialogue shows how downward questioning might occur.

T: *What advice does the writer give a cook who is not used to cooking with herbs and spice?* [No response from the students.]

T: *If someone was not experienced at cooking using ginger what advice would you give him/her about using this spice?* [If there is still no response from the students or still show signs of not understanding, then an even easier form of questioning might be required – that is, down-shift further.]

T: *If you were cooking and you did not know how much spice to put into the food, what would be a good strategy for you to follow: put only a little bit of the spice into the food, or put quite a bit into the food?* [At this stage, one presumes there will be an answer, and the teacher can begin to question 'upward' now, if necessary tracing the questions previously asked, but in reverse order.] The point about such questioning is that it is carried out in the second language, that the focus for students is meaning, and that an implicit message is conveyed to students that they often know more than they think they do and they need to use their background knowledge to help them to understand texts.

Demonstrating and other techniques of visualization are sometimes helpful and even powerful. Demonstration of meanings is more usually associated with vocabulary items where teachers may demonstrate, for example, what an 'oblong' is by the use of their hands. Such visual cues help students to understand new words and store them both as linguistic items as well as visual representations of them. An establishment of this practice in one's classroom also sends a message to students that the first recourse in case of incomprehension is not necessarily the dictionary. Deducing meaning from the context technique can also be used in this case. Here is an example from Mangubhai et al., (1999) that shows how demonstrating brings forth an answer.

[The teacher is comparing two animals.]

T: *Can you tell me something else that is the same? ... Iva, can you tell me something else that is the same?* [waits for an answer]. *What do you know? What did we learn last week?* (as he asks the last question, he bends around points and touches his own spine).

Iva: *Backbone*

Use of visuals in classroom is a powerful way to convey meanings to students. To try to convey the idea of 'globalization' a very good starting point can be a picture of globe (or better still a model of globe itself). The visual aid can lend itself equally well to teach the converse of globe, the local. At early stages of second language learning the use of visuals or objects can be effectively used through a teaching approach called Total Physical Response Method, where a teacher might be able to introduce a series of names of fruit, for example, in the second language through use of fruit, or colors through the use of colored pens. The following example from Mangubhai et al., (1999) shows the use of students' bodies as physical objects.

[The teacher has got students to take on the name of each of the planets in the Solar System. They then introduce themselves as "I am Saturn" and so forth.]

T: *Now this time I want you to re-organize yourself -if you know the answer - from the biggest to the smallest.* [She has the diameters of the planets on a chart, so students have to understand the figures and remember names of the planets (i.e. other students) and get into the right order.] Gestures perhaps fall into a technique of this type.

However, all those techniques above will be less helpful if a routine and consistent organizational structure in which learning activities happen at regular intervals and in predictable ways are not well-maintained.

Conclusion

To sum up, there is no reason for teachers of EFL not to speak in the language they teach to their students. Incomprehension and rejection in the part of students while listening to the teachers speaking in the language do not necessarily mean the demand of translation, availability of dictionary around, or recourse to native-tongue in the part of teacher. Students benefit from the teacher's speech in EFL, it is good for their second language development. To achieve this

condition, a teacher of EFL should always use English when intending to speak in the classroom. In addition, it is necessary that he/she actively evaluate the classroom situation and with all his efforts make immediate decisions about particular technique to further students' understanding of a going classroom topic.

In relation to the ideas briefly presented in this paper the writer recommends the EFL teacher education institutions re-self-assess the spoken English performance quality assurance of the teacher trainees and their Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course material. But, since a good teacher is a good learner, he/she should strive for better professionalism autonomously.

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