OPTIMIZING THE USE OF CLASSROOM LANGUAGE
TO IMPROVE THE SPEAKING CONFIDENCE
OF STUDENTS AT BEGINNER LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English to non-native students in Indonesia, especially pre and elementary school students, is far more problematic than teaching adult students in the same country. These students are not accustomed to use English in their daily lives. When they are given English lesson at school, they often feel afraid, shy, and lack of confidence in using the target language. Students have those feelings mostly when they have to practice speaking English because they find it difficult as they have to master different elements of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, structures, functions and so on in order to say what they want (Phillips, 1993). Consequently, teachers are strongly required to be more patient, to have more preparation time and to be more creative in designing classroom activities. Experts say that young learners are hard to concentrate and easily distracted. If teachers are not able to manage their students, their classes will become chaotic and riotous ones. In order to minimize that condition, teachers need to make any anticipation so that they, instead of their students, can take control of their classes. One of the ways is by making classroom language. This will help teachers to organize their classes and ultimately make their students speak using the target language. This paper promotes classroom language as it is concrete, meaningful, and has communicative nature. Hughes (1990) states that the phrase '*Open your books at page 10, please*' does not make the students only repeat, translate, evaluate as true or false or put into negative, but this makes them do the simple action of opening a textbook after understanding the genuine instruction. Furthermore, classroom phrases help the students to use the target language in appropriate context and indirectly accustom them to the form-function relationships and discrepancies that are parts of English. Considering the phenomena above, this paper offers some techniques that may be used in applying classroom language. Some of those techniques include a lot of drilling techniques and fun games. Hopefully, this paper may become one of considerations to be used by EFL teachers in encouraging their students to be able to speak the target language in most of their time in their English classes. However, this paper is still far of perfection. It still needs a lot of suggestions and deeper discussion from those who are dealing with researches of the same topic.

Key Words:

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Teaching English in Indonesia is considered to be teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), because Indonesia is a country where English is not the native language (Paul, 2003). EFL teachers often find difficulties in making their students use the target language, i.e. English, in their classes. This happens as their students not only have little exposure to English in their daily lives, but their native languages also have different structure and writing systems. As a consequence, students often feel afraid, shy, and not confident in expressing what they want to say in the target language. They prefer to use their native languages in most of their time in their English classes in order to avoid making mistakes.

Phillips (1993:34) also states "A common problem in monolingual classes is that the

children lapse in their own language, often through frustration at not having the English to do the task". Further, she adds that speaking is a difficult skill to teach because students have to master several elements of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, structures, functions, and so on in order to say what they want. This condition also leads students switch to their mother tongue languages whenever they find difficulties in saying or finding the words or phrases of the target language. They are often shy or afraid to ask their teachers since they do not know how to ask the unknown English words or phrases by using English expression. Considering those phenomena, EFL teachers need to spend more time and be more creative in designing their lesson activities so that their students will indirectly be able to produce the target language as they expected. One of the teaching techniques that may be used to make students be accustomed with the English words or phrases is by making classroom language. It is hoped that if students get used to the classroom language, they will have greater confidence in uttering and using the target language, especially in their English classes, because they are not worried anymore about how to formulate what they want to say.

EFL TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS

Teaching EFL to young learners, especially pre and elementary school students, is far more problematic than teaching EFL to adults. Some theories say that children are active learners, both physically and cognitively. In addition, Scott and Ytreberg (1990:2) state that one of characteristics of the young language learners is they have a very short attention and concentration span. In dealing with these problems, teachers need to prepare their lesson by giving interesting activities so that their students enjoy and engage themselves in the lesson. Scott and Ytreberg also say "young learners know that the world is governed by rules. They may not always understand the rules, but they know that they are there to be obeyed, and the rules help to nurture a feeling of security." (1990:2) Based on those two characteristics, teachers have to design activities that make them possible to control of their classes. One of the teaching techniques that can be used is classroom language. Using classroom language makes teachers easier to organize their classes as they have set the 'rules' before doing any activities to the students. Moreover, classroom language can encourage the students to speak using the target language because the students are willingly to obey the 'rules' and aware to remind their friends who break the 'rules'.

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE

According to Scott and Ytreberg, Classroom language is a necessary tool for helping students' progress from dependence on the book and on the teacher to independence (1990:17). They also state that classroom language is simple and meaningful expressions in English that can be learned by students in order to gain cooperation and communication parts of language learning process. These mean that classroom language is important to be mastered by students so that they are able to speak independently to say whatever they want, either to communicate with their teachers or with their friends. Classroom language consists of simple daily expressions that correlate with certain situations to enforce students to speak English as much of the time as they can, especially in their English classes. Young learners are usually interested in what the expressions are used for; therefore, making

classroom language as natural and concrete as possible is necessary to do.

In line with the previous explanation, Paul (2003) states that just after teachers say classroom language naturally, they can help the young learners say the same things in English. Further he says that this is a very good way for the young learners to connect English with their real feelings. Considering these theories, teachers need to use the classroom language naturally, concretely, and meaningfully in order that the students will do the same as their teachers. Some examples of classroom language that are suggested by Paul (2003:81) are as follows.

Simple expressions	Asking for help
Good afternoon	*Could you repeat that, please?*
How are you today?	*What's this in English?*
Thank you.	*What's that in English?*
I'm sorry.	*How do you spell …?*
I don't know.	*I don't understand.*
Good-bye.	*Please help me.*
See you next week.	*How do I say …?*
May I open the window?	
Between the students	From the teacher
Can I borrow your …, please?	*Guess.*
Sure.	*Please stand up.*
Here you are.	*Please open your books.*
It's my turn.	*Let's write/go home.*
It's your turn.	*Let's play …*
May I have a …?	*What's the weather like today?*
	It's time to write/go home.

Hughes (1990) supports previous theories by stating that classroom language is an effective tool not only to limit the use of native language by students but also to create a less disordered atmosphere in English classes. He further states that there are a number of alternative ways of controlling the behavior of the students. The most important of these are: 1) commands, 2) requests, and 3) suggestions. The use of commands emphasizes the teachers' position of authority; requests imply the notion of equality; and suggestion, at least in theory, allow the students some freedom of choice. In addition to those classroom languages, questions can also be used in order to make students familiar in getting information, either from their teachers or from their friends.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES TO OPTIMIZE CLASSROOM LANGUAGE

Classroom language can always be used in any session of English classes. Teachers need to allocate a little time to drill the phrases that they will use during the session in order to retain them

in students' mind. Then teachers should attach the classroom language, which they are going to use in that session, on the wall so that the students can look at and read it whenever they forget of the expressions they need to say. When teachers think that their students have been able to comprehend and to utter those phrases well, they can take them off the wall. However, in order to avoid the boredom of the students, teachers need to be more creative in finding the balance between providing language through controlled and guided activities and at the same time letting the students enjoy natural talk (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990). Some alternatives of teaching techniques in using classroom language will be presented below. Those techniques are using one or more than one categories of Hughes classroom language, i.e. the use of commands, requests, suggestions, and/or questions.

1.　Substitution Drill
Classroom Language:
Please stand up.
Hold your …
Look at Jane.
What is the color of Jane's bag? It is red. It is a red bag.
Whose turn is it? It is mine/yours.
Work in pair.
Procedures:
a)　Ask one of the students to stand at his/her seat. Ask him/her to hold one of his/her belongings in his/her hand. Then ask about its color, and let the students respond in unison.
b)　Repeat that procedure several times, then ask some of the students to replace the teacher's role in choosing their friends to stand up and giving question.
c)　After you are sure that the students have been able to comprehend and utter the target language, ask them to do the same procedures in pairs. They may ask each other questions about their own belongings or their other friends' belongings.

2.　Dialogues by Using Puppets
Classroom Language:
What time do you …? / When do you …?
I get up at … .
I take a bath at … .
I have breakfast at … .
I go to school at … .
I do homework at … .
I go to sleep at … .
How do you say … in English?
Work in threes.
Procedures:
a)　Hold a puppet in your hand. Create a dialogue with the puppet by asking its daily activities. Then ask the students to repeat each part of your dialogue to make them retain the target language.
b)　After that, pretend that the puppet becomes the one that asks different questions to different students. This procedure starts from asking the same first question to some of the students then you can continue by asking the same second question to different group of students.
c)　If you have enough puppets to be used by the students, ask them to work in threes by using one puppet for each group. Ask them to do the same procedure in order to retain the target language in their mind.
3.　Fishbowl Technique
Classroom Language:
Where is the girl? She is behind the woman.
Where are the durians? They are on the table.
On, under, next/beside, between, …
Can I ask you a question?
What is the English word for …?
I'm sorry. I don't know.
Work in pair.

Whose turn is it? It is mine/yours

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Procedures:

a) Give a copy of the attachment below to each pair of students.

b) Invite one of them to be a volunteer model to do the activity with you in front of the class. Everyone watches the teacher and the volunteer model the activity as if they are in a fishbowl.

c) Ask all students repeat each part of the dialogue in unison so that they are able to comprehend and utter the target language.

d) Ask another volunteer to model different expressions. Then do the same procedures as those mentioned above.

e) If you have been sure that the students are able to do the dialogues by themselves, let them work in pairs and ask them to do the activities covering all of the things described in the picture.

4. Chain Work

Classroom Language:

Stand in line.

Stand still.

Stay where you are.

Come to the front.

Stop talking now.

Do you like bananas?

No, I don't like bananas, but I like apples.

How do you say … in English?

I'm sorry. I don't know.

Procedure:

a) Ask the students to stand in two lines. Chain work uses picture cards or word cards. Put all the cards face down in two piles.

b) The first student of each line picks up a card on which there are some bananas. Turning to student 2 he or she says 'Do you like bananas?' Student 2 then picks up the next card on which there are some apples a and answers, 'No, I don't like bananas, but I like apples.' Student 2 turns to student 3 and says, 'Do you like apples?' to which student 3 replies, 'No, I don't like apples, but I like …' and so on.

c) Do the procedure until all of the students get their turns in comprehending and uttering the target language.

5. Controlled Practice

Classroom Language:

Attention please.
Don't disturb your friend.
No cheating.
Be quiet now.
Can you repeat?
Let's do it.
What do you think?
I think it is right/wrong.
How about…?
Can you repeat?
Can I ask you a question?
What is the English word for …?
You can find the clue at/under/on … .
What is he/she doing?
He/She is… ing.

a) Students are supposed to work in small groups.

b) Write some jumbled-letter verbs on different colors of paper. Stick those papers on different places.

c) Each group is given a copy of picture. They are asked to describe the picture by making some sentences of present continuous tense with the verbs they got from the jumbled-letter words.

d) The representatives of each group are sent to take the clue paper based on certain color of paper. Then they have to go back to their groups and try to arrange the jumbled-letter words to make meaningful verbs.

e) If they have found the verbs needed, they can make a sentence of present continuous tense to describe the picture given.

f) The group with the most correct sentences wins the game.

Procedure:

CONCLUSION

An effective teaching may be gained through simple ways. One of the ways is by making and using classroom language. The use of classroom language will lead students to experience enormous exposure and gain greater chance in practicing the target language. Assessment of the effectiveness in the using of the classroom language can be done after several meetings. This can be realized by the giving of reward and punishment to students who have been able to understand and use the classroom language. The more classroom language they can utter and understand, the more reward they can get. Hopefully, the use of classroom language can

increase students' confidence in using the target language in their English classes.

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