

EFFECTIVE TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Adnotare: Articolul examinează ideea interacțiunii profesor-student ca o idee de succes care stă la baza relațiilor umane pozitive dintre oameni. În mod similar cu interacțiunea de zi cu zi, studenții universitari trebuie să fie instruiți pentru a fi comunicatori eficienți într-o limbă străină, limba engleză. Profesorii de limbi străine pot și trebuie să fac acest lucru prin diferite modalități de a încuraja interacțiunea în clasă.

Key words: communicative skills, linguistic competence, classroom interaction, social behaviour, communicative behaviour, pragmatic factors

Development of communicative skills comes from the emphasis of language teaching and linguistic competence of the language learners. Language teachers need to create a correct lesson plan to teach English as a foreign language in an active manner to develop students' communicative skills.

Before the lesson, both teacher and students have some expectations. Language teachers expect that their students will use English at the lesson. Thus, they use English while teaching and presenting new material. Language teachers also plan the tasks for the students in such a way as to use the target language actively in the EFL classroom. The students have their expectations: they expect the teacher should explain and give assignments to them, they want the teacher clarify some difficult problems etc. We believe that without understanding each other's expectations it is likely that a problem will arise in the student-teacher interaction in an EFL classroom. The main aim of the paper is to describe the useful and effective ways of developing productive and communicative skills in an EFL classroom by teacher-student interaction in an EFL classroom. The person who wants to attempt a task must first of all think well of what s/he wants to achieve, how s/he wants to achieve it, and why s/he wants to do it. According to Vizental, the teacher of a foreign language must know what s/he is teaching, how s/he should teach it, why his/her pupils are learning the foreign language (Vizental 2009:15). The first of the questions above relate to the *object* of teaching (*what* to teach) and is strictly related to the notions of *language* and *society*. Consequently, we try to define what *knowledge* of a foreign language means. Approaches to language teaching go hand in hand with the main linguistic theories of the age.

Language is a *semiotic system*, a socially accepted system of *signs*. The signs of the language, its individual speech sounds, letters, words etc., are known and shared by the entire community. For example, the letters of the Latin alphabet are meaningful and have the same value for the entire Western world, but they are foreign to the Russians, or the Japanese, or the Arabs etc., who use another alphabet. In the same way, English words (e.g. *boy*, *girl*, *home*, *to work*) are meaningful to all the speakers of the language, but may sound gibberish to a person who hasn't learned the English language. It is because of a shared system/code that communication within the community is possible (Vizental 2009:23). Vizental suggested that *linguistic competence* is only one aspect of competent speakers' *communicative competence*, their total ability to interact with the help of the language. An experienced person knows the rules of social behaviour—when to speak and when to keep silent, what to talk about in different

situations, or how to address different types of persons. Even small children know that they must address an older person differently from the way they address in general. Analyzing the speaker's communicative behaviour and ordinary exchanges, linguists concluded that the competent speaker's ability to communicate largely depends on *pragmatic* factors. Knowledge of the world and society enables competent speakers to convey more meaning than is carried by the semantic load of their words. The competent communicator also knows how to use language functionally and strategically and to obtain the best results.

Linguists also understood that people use language not only to *say* things, but also to *do* things, to perform actions- or *speech acts*, as the great language philosopher *John Langshaw* named them. For example, ordinary expressions can also perform actions: by saying *Congratulations!* The speaker actually congratulates the listener; by saying *Hand me that book, please,* s/he performs the act of asking.etc. A speech act can be performed by using various linguistic constructs, and many speech acts are indirect, mostly because imperative constructions would not be polite. For example: *Open the window!* it sounds like a command, the polite speaker will prefer to ask, *Can you open the window?* the listener will know that this expression represents an indirect request for the action to be achieved. The same expressions can be used to perform various speech acts, according to the context in which the expression takes place. For example: the simple expression *The door is open!* has different meanings, it can *state* a fact, it can function as an indirect *request* to close it, as an *invitation* to leave, *awarning* that someone can break in. *I have a headache!* May present a request for a pill, or a refusal to go to a party, by saying *Thanks !* a speaker can accept something or refuse it. Interjections and time fillers – *Oh!, Wow!, Really!, You don't say!* – can be used to perform a variety of actions: praise, criticize, express delight or fright etc. The speaker's ability to perform speech acts with the help of the language is closely connected to the functional potential of the language.

According to Leech view, linguists generally agree that language has five basic *features*:

- an *informational* function-people use the language to convey and get information, this may seem the the most important function.

- a *directive* function- using the language to control the behaviour and attitudes of others, to command, demand, inquire and request etc.
- an *expressive* function – using the language to express feelings and attitudes, likes, dislikes, wishes, desires, fears, hopes etc.
- an *aesthetic* function - people often construct their expressions so as to please the ear, rather than for the information the words carry.
- a *phatic* function -using the language for “keeping social relationship in good repair”, what we say is of lesser importance than the fact that we say it, not congratulating a person, not greeting can be perceived as an offence (Leech 1966:13).

To understand the full significance of communicative skills we must also analyze the nature of communication and identify some of its basic features. According to Richards and Rogers (1986) analysis shows that:

- communication is *meaning-based*: communication aims to convey *meaning* through a variety of channels: language, paralanguage etc.; in linguistic exchanges, interlocutors *cooperate*: they produce messages that are *meaningful* and *relevant* for the interlocutors;
- communication is *interactional*: communication requires two participants who interact; meaning is not inherent in words, but negotiated between the interlocutors; the listener’s task is to make the inferences to decode the speaker’s intended meaning;
- communication is *structured*: human communication consists of a variety of *discourse types*: journalistic discourse, the political discourse, the Church, of the court of law, the discourse of classroom interactions, of casual discussion or telephone conversation, of letter writing etc.;
- communication is *conventional*- the participants in a communicative exchange observe certain *social conventions* concerning the *relationship* between: the *interactants*, the *speaker* and the *context* in which the exchange takes place, an official setting;
- communication is *appropriate*- interlocutors *adapt* their discourse to: the relative *social status* between the speaker and the listener (age, position, familiarity etc.), the *roles* they assume in communicative exchange (teacher/student, doctor/patient);

- the *discourse type*- official or informal letters, telephone conversations.etc (Richards, Rodgers 1986\2001: 23-24).

The above analysis conveys the conclusion that communicative skills has a much wider scope than simple linguistic skills. According to Canale and Swain (1980) we can identify at least five *dimensions* of communicative competence (Canale, Swain 1980:25):

1. *linguistic skills*- speaker's ability to use the language *accurately*, to recognize and produce grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences.
2. *sociolinguistic skills*- the speaker's ability to use the language *appropriately* with respect to the social environment, to recognize and adapt his/her message to the interlocutors, to the social and situational context in which the exchange takes place, the activity type etc.
3. *discourse skills*- the speaker's ability to recognize and use the language *appropriately* with respect to the type of discourse; to identify the type of discourse and interpret messages accordingly; to adapt his/her language to the discourse type: to formulate expressions for the telephone conversation, to know the letter-closing formula etc.
4. *strategic skills*- the speaker's ability to use language *functionally*: using the language to perform actions; *strategically*: using linguistic strategies of repair, to convey personal disagreement, of indirectness and politeness, to obtain real-world advantages or avoid negative consequences: a joke can be more effective than a hundred words, to create a favorable atmosphere;
5. *cultural skills* – knowledge of elements of culture and civilization of the foreign language environment: the communicator knows facts belonging to the country, the people, history, literature of the target language. Learning a foreign language involves learning about the world and type of society the native speakers of the language live in: their history and literature, educational system, their history etc.

The important aim of the foreign language class is to develop the students' *communicative skills* (their ability to use the language appropriately, functionally, strategically, as to interact with the other members of the social group), as well as their *cultural skills* (knowledge of the linguistic and non-linguistic customs). The foreign language student

must learn to lead communicative and cultural skills similar to those of the native speaker, they will need such skills later on in the real world situations. Apparently, the classroom provides only a limited range of communicative interactions - as the teacher/student, student/student relationships. It is the foreign language teacher's duty to use the classroom as a kind of laboratory and organize activities that should simulate real-world exchanges. The teacher must stretch his/her imagination and expand the classroom context so as to let the students to use language realistically and interactively. The question-answer exchange between teacher and students was often the only pattern of teacher-learner interaction. In contrast to the students at the front, those at the back either did not volunteer or were unable to read aloud when nominated by the teacher to do so. This pattern is illustrated in the following notes from a teacher's research diary (Bailey 1996:117-118). In practice, in usual teaching situations, we need to give the students practice in grammar and vocabulary (accuracy work) and opportunities to use the language (fluency work) through a combination of class work, pair work and group work. In order to do this effectively, we to organize our class work, pair work and group work so that the students really motivate them.

For effective fluency work in groups, we practiced the description of friends step-by-step beginning with vocabulary practice and finishing with the full description of a person for the lesson "A good friend" for beginners:

1) "Talking about opposites".

Example - A: I thought you said he was *the short, round-faced* person.

B: No, no, no, not at all, he's the *tall, thin-faced* one.

Practice:

1 A: Was that his brother, the dark-skinned, wavy-haired one?

B: No, completely the opposite, his brother's ...

2 A: She's always quite well-dressed, so I've heard.

B: What! Who told you that? Every time I see her, she's ...

3 A: So Charlene's that rather plump, fair-haired woman, is she?

B: No, you're looking at the wrong one. Charlene's ...

4 A: So, tell us about the new boss; good looking?

B: No, I'm afraid not; rather ...

5 A: I don't know why, but I expected the tour-guide to be middle-aged or elderly.

B: No, apparently she's only ...

2) Role-play cards – “Birthday party”.

Person 1: (Student) You are having your birthday party and one of your best friends wants to leave early because he/she had promised to be at home at 10 p.m. You want him/her to stay longer and so you phone to his/her parents and you try to persuade them to allow your friend to stay much longer.....

Person 2: (Teacher) You allowed you son/daughter to stay at his/her friend's birthday party till 10 p.m. Tomorrow you are having a very busy day because you expect a lot of visitors to come. You expect all your children to help you with preparation since early morning.

3) Situational game “Wanted”. The teacher suggests the dialogue between the police officer and the eyewitness. The students should analyse the pictures and pick out the person the witness is describing.

P: How old do you think he was?

W: Well, he was ... young/old/middle aged. In his ... twenties/ fifties, I would say.

P: And was he tall?

W: Yes, quite tall ... taller than me/ Oh, no. He was quite short.

P: What about his build?

W: Well, he was fairly slim/ plump/ overweight/. May be a bit skinny.

P: Did you notice what he was wearing?

W: Oh, yes. He was wearing jeans/ dirty trousers/ blue shorts. Besides, he was wearing horrible pullover/ striped sweater.

It is worth mentioning that language teachers should help students to develop their interaction skills and students themselves can apply various strategies to become effective communicators in a foreign language. The first form of interaction (teacher – learners) is established when a teacher talks to the whole class at the same time. The teacher takes the role of a leader or controller and decides about the type and process of the activity. The primary function of such interaction is controlled practising of certain language structures or vocabulary. Mostly, they are in the form of repeating structures after the teacher (the model). This type of practice is also referred

to as “a drill”. Classroom interaction can be improved through a variety of activities for developing accuracy or fluency and controlled alternately by a teacher and students.

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