

An Analysis of Classroom Language Based on the Cooperative Principle and Face-Saving Theory

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Abstract—This paper investigates the classroom language and its realization and confrontation against Grice's cooperative principle. It analyses four selected fragments in the teaching process of the same class, which mainly introduces a new sentence structure to students. These four Dialogues consist of three stages in an exchange of teaching: initiation, response and feedback. In line with that, this paper unfolds the analyses of classroom language. The results demonstrate that teacher consciously violates the quantity maxims to achieve specific purposes like emphasizing. Meanwhile, the quantity maxims is used for knowledge input as well. Furthermore, the class activities is organized by the teacher according to relation maxim. The interactive communication between teacher and students reflects the strategy in terms of face-saving theory adopted by teacher to interaction during teaching progress. These findings may provide useful insights for classroom language and more effective way of teaching.

Index Terms—Classroom language, Grice's cooperative principle, teaching process.

I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom language, as the most important medium of knowledge transmission, acquisition and construction in formal education, consists of interactive language, discourse spoken by the teacher and students, and even those for chat (Lin, Liu & Wang, 2009) [1]. On the one hand, teacher's language plays an important role in knowledge input; on the other hand, explaining the puzzles and feedback. Whilst the response of students draws the outlines of their knowledge gap, so that teacher can manage the process of class based on their learning status. A number of researchers (e.g. Yang, 2007 [2]; Tang & Liu, 2003 [3]; Wang, 2005 [4]) have studied the classroom language from the perspective of linguistics. As exemplified in the case of Tang and Liu (2003), they have done a pragmatic analysis of teacher's language against the backdrop of speech act theory, focusing on the functions of greeting, instruction, question and statement implied in teacher's discourse. Furthermore, Yang (2007) established a macro-analysis system for foreign language teachers' questioning discourse based on the systemic functional linguistics. It's apparent that linguistic theories are closely related with classroom language.

However, despite these insights, few studies have adopted the living data from the real classroom circumstance, for example how teacher introduces the new knowledge properly. Therefore, the current study aims to bridge this gap by investigating four consecutive dialogues to interpret the

specific maxims of cooperative principle in classroom language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Research of Classroom Process*

The process of classroom language teaching and learning is directly connected to the effect of learning. The studies on the process of classroom originated from the education area, which has a great influence on the research purposes and methods of foreign language teaching and learning in class (Yang, 2003) [5]. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of research perspectives in the studies of classroom process: behavioral psychology and socialism. Under the guidance of behavioral psychology, some scholars advocate objective analysis of observed classroom behaviors (Chaudron, 1988: 18 [6]; Allwright, 1988: 245 [7]; Kumaravadivelu, 1999: 455 [8]). However, it seems incomplete to describe sophisticated situations in classroom solely with various kinds of behaviors. In addition, other researchers consider the process of classroom as interaction from the perspective of socialism, and they resort to lay down certain rules for classroom language. In the rank-scale system of classroom language established by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) [9], teaching exchange, consisting of initiation, response and feedback, plays the most important role. By comparison, analysis of classroom language seems to be more objective and obtains extensive support. While in this paper, three components of teaching exchange is attached closely to the analysis progress.

B. *The Cooperative Principle*

Herbert Paul Grice, an American philosopher, first proposed the striking idea of Conversational Implicature in his William James lectures delivered at Harvard in 1967. This breakthrough started the engine of future development of pragmatics (Craig, 1998) [10]. In fact, the cooperative principle, part of the Gricean theory, has been the target of criticism, interpretation, reformulation and revision for the past fifty years. Whereas, the cooperative principle has inspired a wealth of evolution in the field of theories like the the development of Politeness Principle as a remedy and its further theoretical extension, Face-Saving Theory.

As to the cooperative principle, in line with what Grice mentioned, "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Jiang, 2000) [11]," it entails the general principles that participants will be expected to observe. In what follows, Grice has sought to boil down cooperative principle to

specified four categories, namely quantity, quality, relation and manner which give rise to conversational implicature with violation of different maxims. In previous studies, a number of researchers already related cooperative principle with language teaching closely. As exemplified in the following, Wang (2011) [12] introduces the cooperative principle to reading, listening and speaking teachings. However, most of those studies were short of sufficient examples and didn't cover the whole teaching process of a class, so as to the coherence of teaching and learning is ignored sometimes. This paper tries to analyze a set of consecutive classroom language with cooperative principle to fill the blanks.

C. The Face-Saving Theory

For politeness, we have to sacrifice CP, but sometimes for the accuracy of information, we have to stick to CP. Brown and Levinson (1978) [13] have mentioned that politeness is the rational behavior acted by a model person to save his face. As a result, their politeness principle is called Face-saving theory as well, which is first proposed by Goffman. In accord with that, face is considered to be the self-image of the communicator, including positive face and negative face.

In addition to face-saving theory, there is the face-threaten act as well, which consists of threatening the face of the speaker or the hearer. The judgement about the face-threatening act is closely related to the social distance and relative power of the communicators and the absolute ranking of imposition of speech-act itself in a specific cultural environment.

Brown and Levinson's "face theory" is a basic theory to analyze and guide social interaction, which is also suitable to guide the interaction between teachers and students in classroom teaching, especially it can effectively guide the behavior of teachers in classroom teaching. In order to make classroom teaching activities go smoothly, teachers must create a healthy, positive, democratic and harmonious classroom atmosphere, which is formed in the mutual communication between teachers in the leading position and students in the main position. The dominant position of teachers determines the distance between teachers and students in classroom teaching, and further requires teachers to take into account the face needs of students and protect their self-esteem when organizing teaching process. Only in this way can teachers and students interact smoothly and classroom activities be effectively carried out.

III. METHODS

A. Materials

This paper is based on an excellent course in primary schools, which has been updated to the Internet and has received thunderous applause. In addition, the selected material is an English class with one teacher and thirty pupils. In the teaching progress, target students are pupils equipped with basic vocabulary, and they are stepping into more systematic and complex sentence structure. Teaching aim is to make students familiar with the sentence "Everybody is different" and are able to use some frequent expressions in terms of the description of people.

The reference link of the English teaching class: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av36389610/>

B. Data Analyses

The whole class lasted 42 minutes, while this paper selects a segment of teaching process around 5 minutes to analyze. Conversational data between teacher and students are recorded while the writer was listening to the class video repeatedly. During this progress, four fragments are listed in order. After every fragment, related maxims of the cooperative principle are analyzed with its conversational data. However, part of exchange fragments touches upon face-saving theory as well.

IV. RESULTS

The current study unfolds the results from three parts of teaching process, namely warm up, knowledge input and summary. Meanwhile, in accordance with the focus of classroom language, concrete teaching fragments of initiation, response and feedback in a class are discussed based on the cooperative principle.

A. Warm up

Among the teaching progress of English classroom, "warm up before class" is an effective way to stimulate students' interest in learning. A good beginning is half the success. It is very important and necessary to grasp the students' interest and all the students' attention within a few minutes before class. By carrying out a variety of warm-up interactive activities and mobilizing the learning initiative of students, a better learning outcome is expected under a rather relaxed learning environment.

Fragment one belongs to the lead-in part initiated by teacher's question after students listening to a related song.

English ballads with strong rhythm are used in teaching to bring children a lively, pleasant, loose and harmonious language environment, which caters for the requirement of language learning. Below are the description of teaching exchange in warm up.

Teacher: "Please tell me the name of the song? Do you hear it, the name of the song? The title of the song?"

Students: silence.

T: the name of the song is everybody is (pause for two seconds) different, let's read it, everybody is (pause for two seconds) different, please read after me, different.

Ss: different

T: different

Ss: different

T: everybody is different.

Ss: everybody is different

T: everybody is different.

Ss: everybody is different

In this fragment, there are two kinds of violations of the cooperative principle in terms of quantity maxims and relation maxims implemented by teacher and students respectively. However, the violation of the quantity maxims happens twice in the part of warm up. In the beginning, it's obvious that the teacher repeats the same question three times with different synonym of name. Nevertheless, there is no

time for students to answer the question after the first time and the second time question sentence initiated by the teacher, which implies that the only goal of teacher for violating the quantity maxims is to make her question clear. While in the second violation of the quantity maxims, the teacher lead the students to repeat the target word or sentence repetitively to help them remember the new knowledge. Generally speaking, ideal classroom spacial distance between teacher and students permits students to hear clearly the question at the first time. In the above two cases, the occurrence of violating quantity maxim may service the specific teaching aims of the teacher.

When talks about the relation maxim, exchange from the song to teaching contents relates the process of multi-model switch. After listening to this song, teacher throws out the question at the first time to remind students of getting back to the teaching content. As for this part, it requires the listening material closely related to the teaching content. While when the teacher asks the name of the song, there is no response at all. Accordingly, this can be a failed communication between teacher and students. However, the silence of students in this special teaching background may fall into two reasons: one is it represents students' gap in knowledge that most students are not sure about the answer; and another is students are unwilling to answer questions so as to violate the relation maxims. Given the unequal status between the teacher and the students, the teacher will always fill the gap by knowledge input.

B. Knowledge Input

Input refers to the exposure learners have to authentic language in use. This can be from various sources, including the teacher, other learners, and the environment around the learners. Input can be compared to intake, which is input then taken in and internalized by the learner so it can be applied. The most important and accessible input for learners is that of the teacher. When teachers are talking in classes they are providing opportunities for learners to develop their comprehension. Teachers can optimize this opportunity by choosing the right levels of complexity of vocabulary and structures, speed of delivery, degree of clarity, and range of register and style.

Following fragment two is the information that the teacher input after a piece of lead-in song named Everybody is different. For students, this sentence is a complete new expression so that teacher need to demonstrate it at the beginning.

The teacher sticks the note with the sentence *everybody is different* on the blackboard

T: "Everybody is different. Ok, everybody is (pause for two seconds) different." (with a raising tone) "read after me, everybody is different."

Ss: "Everybody is different."

T: "Very good. Ok, so now let's have a look of the picture. Look at the boy, and we know everybody is different and someone is very ..." (with rising tone)

Ss: Tall

T: Tall. Yes, very good.

T: And someone is quite...(with a rising tone)?

Ss: Strong.

T: And someone is ... (with a rising tone)?

Ss: thin.

T: that's right, let's read the whole sentence. Someone is thin.

Ss: Someone is thin.

T: good, and someone is (with a rising tone)?

At the very beginning of knowledge input, the teacher shows the students the right punctuation on the blackboard, which provides a visual assist for language learning. This fragment includes all the three steps of teaching exchange, namely, initiation, response and feedback. While in the step of initiation of teacher, it accords with the first maxim of quantity: make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purpose of the exchange). On the analogy of the previous one, the instruction initiated by teacher in the first sentence is repeated three times. At first time, teacher gives out the new information; at the second time, teacher pauses for two seconds to attract the attention of students by emphasizing the word *different*; then at the third time, teacher aims to give an instruction which requires students to read after the teacher. As a progress of knowledge input, it makes sense to repeat the same sentence for few times to make sure students understand it. In this case, the way teacher initiates the exchange of teaching caters for the current need. Meanwhile, the accurate response of students confirms the effects of teacher's instruction as well. With respect to feedback, it's generally divided into positive one and negative one. In what follows, teacher takes use of positive feedback to encourage students, which consists of *yes, very good, that's right*, etc. This active feedback expresses teacher's willingness to cooperate and save the positive face of students to a great deal at the same time. Under the influence of close cooperation between teacher and students in the last dialogue, teacher wisely guide students to further related knowledge. Presumably, the adherent rising tone is a hint of asking for response. Following another positive feedback of students' response, new knowledge is introduced and successfully attracts students' attention. In this section, teacher arranges the new knowledge in order, so as to help students understand it more easily. Besides, the teacher help the students to use the new sentence pattern *someone is ...* by switching the pictures in the screen and repeating the sentence pattern.

After the practice involving whole class, teacher carries out individual practice with following fragment three. When teacher switch the pictures on the screen, she hands the microphone to students one by one.

T: Good. and someone is... (with a rising tone)?

S1: Someone is long hair.

T: Someone has long hair, maybe.

S2: Someone is short.

T: Oh, someone is short.

S3: Summer (Someone) is beautiful.

T: Not summer, someone. Someone is beautiful. Ok, thank you.

S4: Someone is big eyes.

T: Someone has big eyes.

In fragment three, students' response and teacher's feedback are the main part. At first, teacher throws out the question with rising tone. Given the habits of using a

complete sentence, students naturally make up the missing part with the new knowledge. This guidance method caters for the quantity maxim of the cooperative principle. Student one makes a mistake in grammar, and teacher corrects him immediately based on negative feedback. While, teacher adds modal verb maybe after her correction, which expresses a sense of uncertainty to save the positive face of student one. Similarly, teacher acts the same negative feedback to correct student three and four. For the wrong pronunciation of student three, teacher denies it directly with not. On the contrary, more euphemistic way of correction is used for students four. These different treatments are not just casually given, but based on the different kinds of mistake the students has made. More specifically, pronunciation is more obscure for students to notice so that teacher would rather sacrifice student's positive face to make his mistake clear. While teacher chooses to correctly repeat the response of student four with the least face intrusion.

C. Summary

Fragment three mainly focuses on the individual practice of students, which seems to be a little bit scattered. In this case, the existence of fragment four as a conclusion is considered as a supplement.

T: Yes, and together, someone has big eyes.

Ss: Someone has big eyes.

(together with teacher)

T: Ok, let's look at this. Someone has...?

(switch the picture on the screen)

Ss: Glasses.

T: And someone has...?

(switch the picture on the screen)

Ss: Very good eyes.

T: So, this is why we say everybody is...?

Ss: Different.

T: Yes, everybody is different.

It's been well known that discursive points of knowledge are barriers to study systematically. In this fragment, teacher tries to sum up and relate all the knowledge together. During this progress, students are able to respond properly based the relation with previous knowledge. At the last sentence, teacher has got the ideal answer of students, but she keeps repeating the whole sentence. This kind of violation of quantity maxims is used to highlight the teaching content again. What worth mentioning is that the way teacher ask question threatens the negative faces of students. Students have no choice but answer the question. This kind of intrusion helps teacher to control the teaching process and to attract students' attention, but it also limits self-expression of students. Meanwhile, teacher takes measure to save their positive face with words Yes, so as to encourage students for further study.

V. CONCLUSION

Classroom language, as a specific type of dialogue, may violate the cooperative principle for different functions. Teacher purposely violate the maxims of quantity to emphasize the important knowledge and call students' attention to teaching contents. Furthermore, frequent

repetition of teacher's language conforms to the leaning characteristics of pupils, who need the obvious guidance of teacher. As to relation maxims, teacher needs to arrange his or her languages orderly and make sure they are in accordance with the relation maxims during the teaching process of one language point. However, students may hold different attitudes toward relation maxims: they tend to violate the relation maxims given their habits of receiving knowledge other than output; Whilst students choose to obey relation maxims when they are inspired to complete the whole sentence. In what follows, the research has also shown that teacher tends to feedback positively for the sake of student's positive face, only if the mistake made by students need clarifying. It's construed as an encouragement for students. Whilst what may be beneficial for future research is to investigate the classroom language against the backdrop of more data, and compare the effects of different language styles. Besides, influential factors like the classroom environment, power and social distance are not considered in the current study. In closing, the application of the cooperative principle has to take consideration of the unique characteristics of classroom language.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The whole paper is completed by the author independently, including analyzing the data, writing the paper and approving the final version, etc.

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