

Teacher Talk and EFL in University Classrooms

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The definition of teacher talk

For foreign language learners , classroom is the main place where they are frequently exposed to the target language. The kind of language used by the teacher for instruction in the classroom is known as teacher talk (TT). For this term, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines it as “that variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching. In trying to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners” (Richards, 1992: 471).

Having studied the SLA for many years, Rod Ellis (1985) has formulated his own view about teacher talk: “Teacher talk is the special language that teachers use when addressing L2 learners in the classroom. There is systematic simplification of the formal properties of the teacher’s language... studies of teacher talk can be divided into those that investigate the type of language that teachers use in language classrooms and those that investigate in the type of language they use in subject lessons.” He also commented “the language that teachers address to L2 learner is treated as a register, with its own specific formal and linguistics properties” (Ellis, 1985: 145).

In this research, it is the oral form of teacher talk instead of written form that is under this investigation. It refers to the language that teachers use in language classrooms rather than in other settings.

From the definitions, firstly we can see that teacher talk in English classrooms is regarded as one special variety of the English language, so it has its own specific features which other varieties do not share. Because of the restriction of the physical setting, special participants as well as the goal of teaching, teacher talk has its own special style.

Secondly, we can see that teacher talk is a special communicative activity. Its goal is to communicate with students and develops students’ foreign language proficiency.

Teacher talk is used in class when teachers are conducting instructions, cultivating their intellectual ability and managing classroom activities (Feng Qican, 1999: 23). Teachers adopt the target language to promote their communication with learners. In this way, learners practice the language by responding to what their teacher says. Besides, teachers use the language to encourage the communication between learners and themselves. Therefore we can say teacher talk is a kind of communication-based or interaction-based talk.

1.2 Rational of the thesis

Language teaching is a complex process involving many interrelated factors. Larsen-Freeman points out: language teaching can be summarized into three fields: language learner/learning (How to learn); language/culture (What to Learn); teacher/teaching (How to teach). (Johnson, 2002: F24). Since 1960s, the research on classroom discourse has grown rapidly. Before that, teaching methodology has been explored and an effective teaching method is tried to be found. Since teaching methods don't play a decisive role in language classrooms, the focus has shifted from teaching methods to teachers' talk in classroom process. Just as Ellis (1985:143) points out: "Classroom process research, as Gaies calls the study of communication in the classroom, has taken different form. The earliest was interaction analysis... An alternative approach focused only on the language used by the teacher when addressing second language learners. It sought to tabulate the adjustments which occur in teacher talk."

Teacher talk is particularly important to language teaching.(Cook, 2000:144). According to pedagogical theory, the language that teachers use in classrooms determines to a larger degree whether a class will succeed or not. Many scholars found teacher talk makes up around 70% of classroom language (Cook, 2000; Chaudron, 1988; Zhao Xiaohong, 1998).Teachers pass on knowledge and skills, organize teaching activities and help students practice through teacher talk. In English classrooms, teachers' language is not only the object of the course, but also the medium to achieve

the teaching objective. Both the organization of the classroom and the goal of teaching are achieved through teacher talk.

In China, most people learn a foreign language in classrooms. Classroom language is the chief source of foreign language learning and in some places the only source. It functions not only as a major source of language learning but also as a tool by which a foreign language is taught. We have not learnt enough about second language acquisition (SLA), but it is believed that the language that teachers address to L2 learners will to some degree influences language learning, although how and to what degree it influences language learning still remains unclear. Since a better understanding of the use of teachers' language can undoubtedly help students improve their learning, and students can make a better use of teacher talk to learn the target language, it is necessary to do some research on teacher talk from both theoretical and practical perspective.

1.3 The purpose of this thesis

In recent years, studies on the language that teachers use in language classroom has gradually drawn people's attention, the attention paid to it has become gradually increasing both abroad and in China.

In the past years, most of the researches on teacher talk have only devoted to the analysis of various phenomena about teacher talk and the objective description on teacher talk such as its characters and structure. However, few researches have explored the effects of TT on second language acquisition (SLA). TT, as a vital aspect of classroom-based language learning, is influenced by many factors. Students, though, count a significant part of teaching and learning in classrooms, have not been considered in the previous studies. It is clear that TT is influenced by many factors. As one of the important factors in language classrooms, the students, to be more exact, the students' learning needs and language proficiency can not be neglected. However, so far all the researches on TT have not taken the factor of students into consideration. After a long time classroom observation, the author found that quite a few teachers talk in classrooms

according to the teaching contents or examinations, and completely neglect the students' learning needs.

So the present study is conducted with a purpose to investigate how TT in foreign language classrooms in our country affects foreign language learning (the language is mainly English language) from a different perspective--comparing the students' preferences towards the ideal teacher with the real TT. The specific purpose is to provide empirical evidence to the suggestion that the appropriate use of teacher talk would enhance foreign language teaching and learning, and teachers should talk consciously in classrooms. In this way, teachers can improve their language quality consciously so that English language teaching and learning can be facilitated. Although TT involves many aspects, this research just focuses on three aspects which are related closely to language learning, that is: the amount of teacher talk; teachers' questioning; teachers' assessment.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Besides the introduction part, there are four other chapters. They will be introduced separately as follows:

Chapter One comes to the conception of TT firstly, and then presents the rationale and the purpose of the present study.

Chapter Two presents the related studies on TT. It reviews the research background and discusses the role of TT in language teaching and learning, and then the features on TT. On the bases of the features of TT, it introduces the related theories that would be involved in this study.

Chapter Three deals with the observation and investigation of teacher talk in foreign language classrooms in our university. The research questions, methods, instrumentation, data collection and analysis are presented, and the results are discussed.

Based on Chapter Three, causes for the results are analyzed considering the culture background and the reality in China. Then some implications are suggested in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five, the conclusion part, summarizes the findings obtained from the

present study. Then it discusses the limitations of the present study and puts forward some suggestions for the further study on teacher talk.

Chapter 2 Previous Studies and Related Theories

2.1 Background overview and the role of TT

2.1.1 Background overview

As a critical part of classroom teaching, teacher talk did not arouse attention of academic field as early as those studies on teaching. A close study on teacher talk owes much to the development of the branch of micro-teaching -- classroom research.

Classroom-centered research or classroom-originated research investigates the process of teaching and learning as they occur in classroom setting. "It simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom" (Allwright & Baily, 1991:3). Its aim is to identify the phenomena that promote or hamper learning in the classroom.

The growth of interest in the analysis of teacher language has been stimulated by the rejection of language teaching method as the principal determinant of successful learning. At first, the underlying assumption in teaching had been finding the right method. It was believed that the teaching effect was completely determined by the choice of teaching method. Studies such as those by Scherer and Wertheimer (1964) and Smith (1970) investigated the comparative effectiveness of methods such as grammar-translation, audio-lingualism, and cognitive code, but were not able to demonstrate that one was more successful than another (Ellis, 1985: 143). Despite the apparent differences in methodological principles, the various methods led to very similar patterns of classroom communication, with the result that the language learning outcomes were also similar.

Having retreated from focus on method, researchers began to hypothesize that classroom interaction was the major variable affecting SLA. "An offshoot of the comparative method studies, then, was to direct researchers' attention to the processes of classroom interaction by collecting language data from the classroom itself" (Ellis, 1985:143).

"Classroom process research, as Gaies (1983) calls the study of communication in

the classroom, has taken different forms: interaction analysis; teacher talk; discourse analysis” (Ellis, 1985:143). All dimensions of classroom process, from giving instruction to questioning or disciplining students, providing the feedback, involve teacher talk. Study on teacher talk has become one of the most important parts of classroom research.

2.1.2 The role of TT in foreign language learning

There is no learning without teaching. So as a tool of implementing teaching plans and achieving teaching goals, teacher talk plays a vital important role in language learning. Quite a few researches have discussed the relationship between teacher talk and language learning. As Nunan (1991) points out: “Teacher talk is of crucial importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in implementing their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is important because it is probably the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive.” The amount and type of teacher talk is even regarded as a decisive factor of success or failure in classroom teaching. (Hakansson, cited from Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun, 2002)

According to SLA theory, plenty of and high-quality input is the necessary element for successful language learning. There is no learning without input. “If the second language is learnt as a foreign language in a language class in a non-supportive environment, instruction is likely to be the major or even the only source of target language input” (Stern, 1983:400). Here instruction refers to teacher instruction -- teacher talk. In China, classroom is the chief source for language learner in most places and the only source in some places, TT serves as the major target language input for the language learners. Stern proposed a teaching-learning model which identified two principle actors, the language teacher and the language learner. (See Figure 2.1)

“The teacher, like the learner, brings to language teaching certain characteristics

which may have bearing on educational treatment: age, sex, previous education, and personal qualities. Above all, the language teacher brings to it a language background and experience, professional training as a linguist and teacher, previous language teaching experience, and more or less formulated theoretical presuppositions about language, language learning and teaching” (Stern, 1983: 500). These characteristics of language teacher are reflected in different characteristics and forms of TT. Stern’s teaching-learning model reveals the important role of the language teacher and teacher talk during the process of language learning.

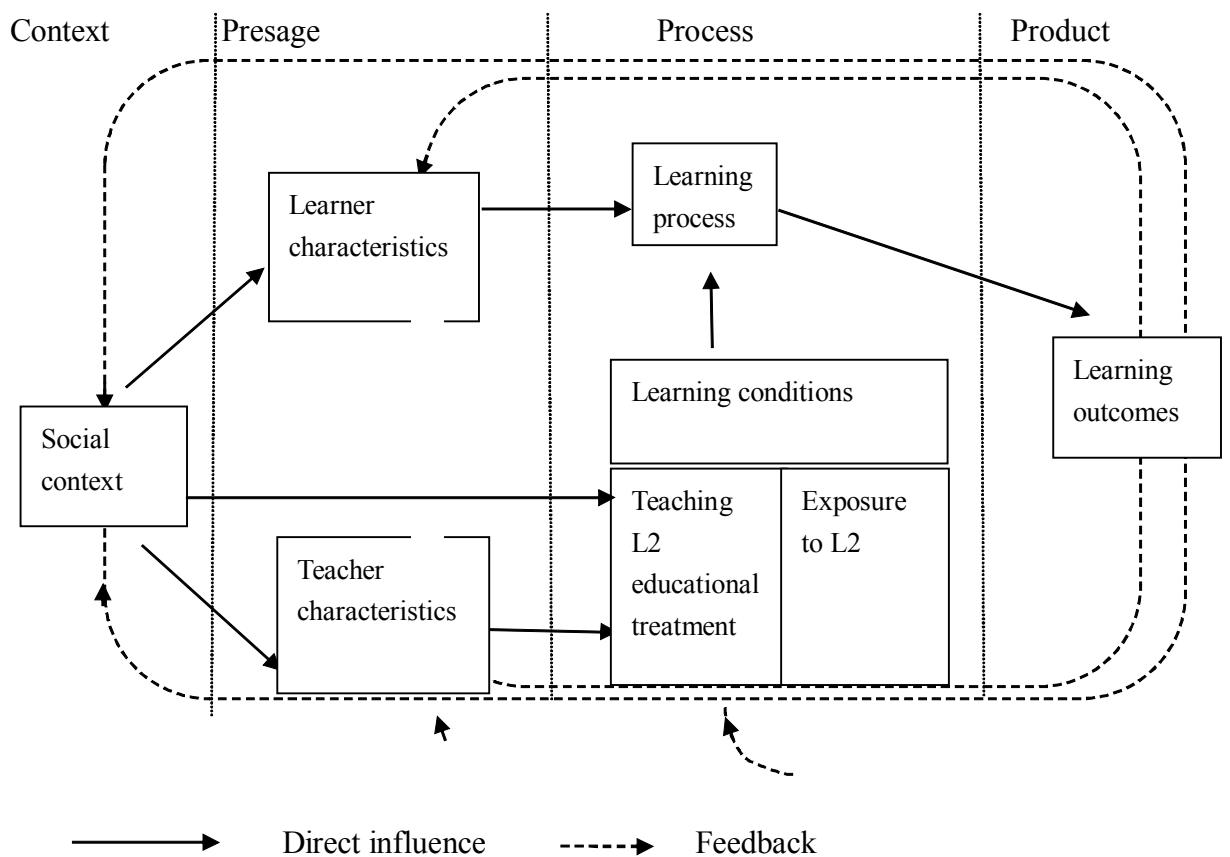


Figure 2.1 A teaching-learning model (Stern, 1983: 500)

As a compulsory course of undergraduates, College English teaching and learning

in China is very important. According to the National College English Syllabus, English is assigned as the basic media for classroom activities, and four skills of language learning -- listening, speaking, reading and writing are expected to acquire by learners. English instruction is not identical to other lecture courses. In situations where the target language is seldom used outside the classroom, for example, in China, the students' exposure to the target language is mainly received in the classroom. So the classroom exclusively comes to be an ideal place for learners to learn English if it allows learners to be in continuous contact with teachers who speak the target language and with peer learners who can practice the language together to help in learning. The kind of input and interaction that is made available by TT is particularly important. Ellis (1985:143) also points out: whether it is a subject lesson or a language lesson, successful outcomes may depend on the type of language used by the teacher and the type of interactions occurring in the classroom. It can be concluded that TT in the EFL classroom serves as at least two functions. Firstly, it serves as a valuable input of language exposure. Secondly, it is used in different ways to generate the interaction, to make the input comprehensible and consequently make the learning take place.

2.2 The features of TT

Most of the researches on teacher talk mainly focus on its features and TT has many kinds of features. According to some scholars (Hu Xuewen, 2003; Dai Weidong & Li Ming, 1998), teacher talk is regarded as a special simplified code with double features. The first one refers to the form of teacher talk, such as the speed, pause, repetition, modifications of teacher talk. The second one, which refers to the features of the language that teachers use to organize and control classes, includes the following aspects: the quality and quantity of teacher talk; the questions teachers use; interactional modifications and teachers' feedback. In China, some scholars call the first one "the formal features of teacher talk" and the second one "the functional features of teacher talk" (Hu Xuewen, 2003).

2.2.1 The formal features of teacher talk

Gaies (1977,1979), Henzl (1979), Long (1983b), Long & Sato (1983) observed all kinds of phenomena about teacher talk, and made some comparison between the language that teachers use in and out of language classrooms. Their main findings are as follows:

1) Formal adjustments occur at all language levels. Henzl observed adjustments in pronunciation, in lexis, and in grammar.

2) In general, ungrammatical speech modifications do not occur.

3) Interactional adjustments occur. (Ellis, 1985:145)

Long and Freeman found that teacher talk is simplified in other ways -- syntactically, phonologically and semantically. In the syntactic domain, utterance length to children is shorter. In the area of phonology, speech to children is pitched higher, has more exaggerated intonation, and uses a wider pitch range. It's characterized by clearer articulation, pauses between utterances and an overall slower rate of delivery. In the semantic domain, vocabulary is more restricted, teachers carefully select the words they use according to the students proficiency and level. New words and difficult words are avoided.

Chaudron (1988:85), having investigated teacher talk for a long time and summarized some research results on teacher talk, proposed teacher talk in language classrooms tends to show the following modifications:

1) Rate of speech appears to be slower.

2) Pauses, which may be evidence of the speaker planning more, are possibly more frequent and longer.

3) Pronunciation tends to be exaggerated and simplified.

4) Vocabulary use is more basic.

5) Degree of subordination is slower.

6) More declaratives and statements are used than questions.

7) Teachers may self-repeat more frequently.

In China, some scholars observed teachers' behavior in college English classrooms

and drew the following conclusion which is similar to Chaudron's:

1) The rate of teacher talk speed is obviously slower than the natural talk speed.

2) More and longer pauses happen between utterances.

3) Pronunciation tends to be clearer, exaggerated, higher and wider pitch range.

More stresses are used and rhythm is obvious and clear. Contracted form of language is less used. For example, teachers use more 'He will' instead of 'He'll' in pronunciation.

4) Basic and simple words are often used.

5) More unmarked words and structure are used. Degree of subordination is lower. More statements and imperatives are used. More general questions are used than special questions.

6) More self-repeat. (Hu Xuewen, 2003)

These findings reflect some properties of teacher talk. Formal adjustment occurs at all language levels in and out of the class. Teachers choose different words to meet the need of class teaching. Ungrammatical speech modifications should not occur in teacher's language in class, because teacher talk should be the model for students to imitate. Interactional adjustment occurs. Activities in class are for learning, so language in these activities is lack of real communicative information. Parker and Chaudron (Nunan, 1991:191) conclude that the studies seem to indicate that linguistic simplifications such as simpler syntax and simpler vocabulary do not have as significant an effect on L2 comprehension as elaborative modifications.

Because this research focuses on the functional features instead of the formal features of TT, so the formal features of TT will not be discussed any longer in the following parts.

2.2.2 The functional features of teacher talk

2.2.2.1 The amount of TT.

According to second language acquisition theories, both teachers and students should participate in language classes actively. Teachers have to face two tasks in

language classrooms: 1) offer enough high-quality English language input; 2) offer more opportunities for students to use the target language. So the distribution of teacher talk time, as an important factor that affect language learning, has been concerned by many scholars.

An important issue is whether the amount of teacher talk influences learners' L2 acquisition or foreign language learning. A great number of researchers have testified this. Researches in language classrooms have established that teachers tend to do most of the classroom talk. Teacher talk makes up over 70 percent of the total talk. (Cook, 2000; Legarreta, 1977; Chaudron, 1988; Zhao Xiaohong, 1998) It is evident that if teachers devote large amounts of time to explanations or management instructions, student talk will be indeed severely restricted. Teacher-initiated talk will dominate the classroom, allowing little opportunity for extended student talk. In such an environment, students have little opportunity to develop their language proficiency. In order to avoid the over-use of teacher talk, many scholars tend to maximize student talk time (STT) and minimize teacher talk time (TTT) (Zhao Xiaohong, 1998; Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun, 2002). Harmer points out that the best lessons are ones where STT is maximized. Getting students to speak -- to use the language they are learning -- is a vital part of a teacher's job (Harmer, 2000: 4).

American scholar Wong-Fillmore put forward her finding that is different from others' after observing primary language classrooms for three years. She found all the success in SLA occurred in teacher-dominated classes. In contrast, little SLA took place in classes with too much interaction among students. Fillmore explained these results in terms of the type of input which was received in the different classrooms. In successful classrooms the teachers serve as the main source of input, the learners can receive enough and accurate input. However in student-centered classrooms, the pupils did not receive so much teacher input, and tended to use the L1 when talking among themselves. Therefore, Fillmore argued the amount of TT should not be decreased blindly. If do so, she suggested two conditions to ensure successful SLA in classrooms from the 40 classes she investigated: one is the students must have high-level language proficiency

so that they can communicate with their teacher and among themselves; the other is there must be enough students who want to communicate in class. If the two conditions do not exist in classrooms, the decrease of teacher talk time won't lead to successful language learning.

Can the classrooms in China meet the two conditions? What is the appropriate amount of teacher talk in college English classrooms in China?

2.2.2.2 Teachers' questions

Questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers (Jack C. Richards & Charles Lockhart, 2000) and serves as the principal way in which teachers control the classroom interaction. The tendency for teachers to ask many questions has been observed in many investigations (Chaudron, 1988). In some classrooms over half of class time is taken up by question-and-answer exchanges (Richards & Charles Lockhart, 2000). Teachers' questions have attracted considerable attention from researchers of language classroom.

Functions of teachers' questions

The pervasiveness of teacher questions in the classroom can be explained by the specific functions they perform. These functions can be grouped into three broad areas: diagnostic, instructional, and motivational (Donald, K & Paul D. Eggen, 1989).

As a diagnostic tool, classroom questions allow the teacher to glimpse into the minds of students to find out not only what they know or don't know but also how they think about a topic. Recent research on schema theory suggests that the structure of students' existing knowledge is a powerful determinant of how new information will be learned, and that often student misconceptions and prior beliefs interfere with the learning of new material (Mayer, 1987; Donald, K & Paul D. Eggen, 1989). Through strategic questioning, the teacher can assess the current state of student thinking, identifying not only what students know but also gaps and misconceptions.

A second important function that questions perform is instructional. The

instructional function focuses on the role that questions play in helping students learn new material and integrate it with the old one. Questions provide the practice and feedback essential for the development. Questions alert students to the information in a lesson. Questions are also valuable in the learning of integrated bodies of knowledge. Toward this goal, questions can be used to review previously learned material to establish a knowledge base for the new material to be learned. In addition, as the new material is being developed, questions can be used to clarify relationships within the content being discussed.

A third function that classroom questions perform is motivational. Through questions teachers can engage students actively in the lesson at hand, challenging their thinking and posing problems for them to consider. From a lesson perspective, a question at the beginning can be used to capture students' attention and provide a focus for the lesson. In addition, frequent and periodic questions can encourage active participation and provide opportunities in the lesson for continued student involvement. Research in this area shows student on-task behaviors are highest during teacher-led questioning sessions. Finally, at the individual level, questions can be used to draw wandering students back into the lesson or to provide an opportunity for one student to "shine".

The types of teacher's questions

Most of the researches on teachers' question focus on the classification of it. There are many different ways to classify questions. Barnes examined the questions asked by teachers and classified the questions into four types. The first type is questions concerning factual matters, that is, the questions beginning with "what". The second type is questions of inference beginning with "how" and "why". The third type is open questions which do not require any inference. And the last type is questions for communication, which could affect and control the behavior of learners. Barnes further classified the second type into closed questions and open questions. Questions are closed because there is only one existing answer, while to open questions there are more than

one answer. Barnes also stressed that some questions seemed open, but the answers were closed.

Jack C. Richards & Charles Lockhart (2000) classify the questions into three categories in terms of the purpose of questions in classrooms -- procedural, convergent, and divergent. Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures and routines and classroom management. They are used to ensure the smooth flow of the teaching process. Unlike procedural questions, many of the questions teachers ask, such as convergent and divergent questions, are designed to engage students in the content of the lesson, to facilitate their comprehension, and to promote classroom interaction. Convergent questions encourage similar student responses, or responses which focus on a central theme. These responses are often short answers, such as “yes” or “no” or short statements. They do not usually require students to engage in high-level thinking in order to come up with a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information. Divergent questions are quite different from convergent questions. These questions encourage diverse student responses which are not short answers and which require students to engage in higher-level thinking. They encourage students to provide their own information rather than recall previously presented information.

With the growth in concern for communication in language classrooms, a further distinction has been made between “display” and “referential” questions by Long and Sato (1983). Display questions refer to ones that teachers know the answer and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures. For example, *‘what’s the opposite of up in English?’* On the contrary, referential questions refer to the questions that teachers do not know the answers to, and can gain various subjective information. For example, *‘Why don’t you do your homework?’* Because closed questions and convergent questions have the same feature as referential questions, they are regarded as the same type of questions; so are open questions and divergent questions.

It has often been observed that teachers tend to ask more display questions than referential questions (Barnes, cited from Yu & Yu, 2005; Long & Sato, 1983; Pica & Long, cited from Ellis, 1994). The explanation for this by Barnes is the role the teachers play.

If the teachers just pass on information rather than encourage students to participate in classroom activities, they tend to ask referential question. However, Long & Sato conclude that is because the teachers emphasized much more on the form and accuracy of the language, instead of the meaning of language and communication. It must be pointed out that all their researches were conducted in teacher-dominated classrooms. In student-centered language classrooms, proportionately more referential questions were asked than display questions (Zhou Xing & Zhou Yun, 2002).

2.2.2.3 Teacher's feedback

Providing feedback to learners on their performance is another important aspect of teaching. Feedback is teachers' evaluation of the student response (Cook, 2000). Feedback can be either positive or negative and may serve not only to let learners know how well they have performed but also to increase motivation and build a supportive classroom climate. In language classrooms, feedback on a student's spoken language may be a response either to the content of what a student has produced or to the form of an utterance. Feedback can be given by means of praise, by any relevant comment or action, or by silence (Richards, J. & Lockhart, 2000).

Weinstein (1989) found that children learned how 'smart' they were mainly from teacher's feedback in the form of marks, comments, and the degree and type of praise and criticism. Children report differences in the frequencies of teacher interactions with different types of learners, with high achievers seen as receiving more positive feedback from the teacher, as well as being given more opportunities to perform, to be challenged and to serve as leaders. By contrast, low achievers are reported to receive more negative feedback, more direction, and help giving as well.

Wheldall and Merrett (1987) cite a large number of studies showing that rewards, such as praise, are far more effective than punishment. The evidence on punishments tends to reveal that not only are they ineffective in bringing about positive change, but they can often have the opposite effect. Therefore, they have even built an approach to teaching based on this Principle which they term 'Positive Teaching' and which they

claim to be highly effective (Wheldall and Merrett, 1984).

Most theorists and practitioners agree that favorable feedback about performance has a positive effect on subsequent performance. Knowledge of poor results for some children could be devastating, so we should try to strike at the right level with each child to ensure high success rates. Nevertheless, we should avoid the fallacy of trying to pretend that a child's performance is good when it is not. This only leads to low personal standards. By insisting on realistic goals and thus ensuring some measure of success for each child, we are increasing the likelihood of reinforcement.

Therefore, teachers' feedback plays a significant part in an individual's motivation. Besides, it should be emphasized here that the potentially negative effects of rewards and praise are more likely to occur when extrinsic motivators are superfluous and unnecessary.

Feedback has two main distinguishable components: Correction and assessment (Ur, 2000: 242).

Teacher's Correction

Inevitably learners will make mistakes in the process of learning. "A learner's errors... are significant in (that) they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language (Brown, 2002: 205)." It is a vital part of the teacher's role to point out students' mistakes and provide correction. In correction, some specific information is provided on aspects of the learners' performance, through explanation, or provision of better or other alternatives, or through elicitation of these from the learner (Ur, 2000). Correction helps students to clarify their understanding of meaning and construction of the language.

One of the crucial issues is how correction is expressed: gently or assertively, supportively or as a condemnation, tactfully or rudely. Ur (2000) points out we should go for encouraging, tactful correction. The learner has reliable intuitive knowledge about what kind of correction helps most, that is, learner preferences are on the whole a

reliable guide. So teachers have to be careful when correcting, if teachers do it in an insensitive way, the students will feel upset and lose their confidence.

What kind of correction teachers think is best and learners find most useful? A good deal of teacher sensitivity is needed here.

Generally, the teachers always adopt the following techniques to correct students' errors (Ur, 2000:249):

- 1) Does not react at all.
- 2) Indicates there is a mistake, but does not provide any further information about what is wrong.
- 3) Says what was wrong and provides a model of the acceptable version. That is -- explicit correction.
- 4) Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from the learner who made the mistake (Self-repair).
- 5) Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from another member of the class.
- 6) Ask the learner who made the mistake to reproduce the corrected version.
- 7) Provides or elicits an explanation of why the mistake was made and how to avoid it.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that it is just as important to praise students for their success, as it is to correct them when they fail. Teachers can show their praise through the use of encouraging words and noises ('good', 'well done', 'fantastic', 'mmm,' etc.) when students are doing really well (Harmer, 2000).

Teacher's Assessment

Assessment refers to the tools, techniques and procedures for collecting and interpreting information about what learners can and cannot do (Nunan, 2001). In assessment, the learner is simply informed how well or badly he or she has performed. A percentage grade on an exam would be one example; or the response "No" to an

attempted answer to a question in EFL classroom; or a comment such as “Excellent” at the end of a written assignment (Ur, 2000). Whenever teachers give assessment on the students, we should not forget that the purpose is to help and promote EFL learning. Therefore, teacher’s talk should be full of approval and encouragement besides confirmation. The following lists some words and phrases when teachers evaluate students’ performance.

Confirmation

- 1) Good

Right; yes; fine; you are right; that is correct; you have got it.

- 2) Excellent

Very good; terrific; well done; good work; marvelous; you did a very good job.

- 3) That is perfectly correct

There is nothing wrong with your answer; what you said is right; that is exactly the point; I couldn’t have given a better answer myself.

- 4) No, that is wrong

Not really; unfortunately not; I am afraid that is not quite right; you can not say that, I am afraid; you can not use that; not quite right.

Encouragement

- 1) That is better

That is much better; that is more like it; you have improved a little; you have very good pronunciation; you read fluently; you have made a lot of progress; you are getting better.

- 2) Try it again

Try again; have another try; you were almost right that time; almost right; not exactly; you have almost got it; take it easy; there is no need to hurry; go on; have a guess if you don’t know; maybe this will help you; well, err....

- 3) Don’t worry

Don’t worry about ...; I’ll help you; maybe this will help you.

The following grumbles should be avoided as much as possible in EFL classroom.

1) That wasn't very good

That was rather disappointing; that wasn't up to much; I am not satisfied with that; that is awful/ terrible.

2) You can do better than that

Can't you do better than that; when you try this again, I expect you to...; the next time you do this, I want you all to...; this is the last time I shall tell you.

3) You fool

Idiot; you stupid idiot; I have never heard anything so ridiculous; what a load of rubbish.

It is clearly up to teachers to decide what kind of phrases are appropriate. Expressions of joy, sympathy, surprise, interest, etc., may also be equally effective: *Good gracious; you are right; it must be my lucky day; that is a very interesting suggestion, but...*and the like. Teachers should employ as much approval and encouragement as possible in foreign language classrooms, which will be conducive to the development of the students' positive affect and the foreign language learning.

2.3 Related theories

2.3.1 Krashen's Input Theory

Input plays a critical role in language learning. There is no learning without input. The language used by the teacher affects the language produced by the learners, the interaction generated, and hence the kind of learning that takes place. The problem is what type and how much of input is appropriate and useful for language learners in classrooms.

In Krashen's view, learning only takes place by means of a learner's access to comprehensible input. "Humans acquire language in only one way -- by understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input. Learning will occur when unknown

items are only just beyond the learner's level. It is explained in detail "i+1" structure. "i" stands for the learners' current linguistic competence, and "1" stands for the items the learners intend to learn. The Input Theory also has two corollaries (Krashen, 1985: 2):

Corollary 1: Speaking is a result of acquisition, not its cause; it emerges as result of building competence via comprehensible input.

Corollary 2: If input is understood and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order -- it will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviews if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input.

By examining the idea of comprehensible input and the two corollaries, one can find that comprehensive and right quantity input is the central concern with which learners are able to learn language. It is the foundation or premise of the occurrence of learning. This provides implications for language teaching: teacher talk should be comprehensible in different forms and in right quantities. But how could teachers know whether their input is enough or not? How could they make their input comprehensible? Krashen describes two ways: the linguistic resources are insufficient for immediate decoding. Simplified input can be made available to the learner through one-way or two-way interaction, with the former including listening to a lecture, watching television and reading, and the latter occurring in conversations. Krashen stresses that two-way interaction is a particularly good way of providing comprehensible input because it enables the learner to obtain additional contextual information and optimally adjusted input when meaning has to be negotiated because of communication problems.

In Krashen's view, acquisition takes place by means of a learner's access to comprehensible input. He comments that the input, which is totally incomprehensible to learners, is not likely to cause learning to take place. Teacher talk, actually serves as main sources of input of language exposure in classroom learning, is more important for foreign language learning, so teachers should make their input comprehensible and in right quantities.

2.3.2 Swain's Output Hypothesis

Krashen's Input Theory and its key notion of 'comprehensible input' have been criticized. One major objection relates to the fact that, though comprehensible input may play an important role, it is not in itself enough: understanding is not quite the same as acquiring. One argument along these lines is put forward by Swain (1985). Her Output Hypothesis emphasizes the role of outcome in SLA. She argued that comprehensible input is not a sufficient condition for SLA, it is only when input becomes intake that SLA takes place. Learners can improve their language level through pushing them to produce output -- actually to say and write things, or through using the language exposed to them in meaningful ways. Swain concludes the role of output in three points.

The need to produce output in the process of negotiating meaning that is precise, coherent and appropriate encourages the learner to develop the necessary grammatical resources, which are referred to as "pushed language use".

Output provides the learner with the opportunity to try out hypothesis to see if they work.

Production, as opposed to comprehension, may help to force the learner to move from semantic to syntactic processing. It is possible to comprehend a message without any syntactic analysis of the input it contains. Production is the trigger that forces learners to pay attention to the means of expression.

Swain (1985) particularly emphasizes that it is only when learners are pushed to use the target language, in other words, it is only when learners think it necessary to improve and develop the target language level, language output can contribute to language acquisition.

Besides "pushed" language use, Swain (1985) reports two other additional functions of output in L2 acquisition. The first one is supposed to provide learners the opportunity to test their hypothesis about the language, or "to try out means of expression and see if they work". The second function is that actually using the language "may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing"

(Swain, 1985:249). In short, the argument put forward by Swain is that immersion students do not achieve nativelike productive competence “not because their comprehensible input is limited but because their comprehensible output is limited”. On the one hand, students are simply not provided with adequate opportunities to use the target language in the classroom. On the other hand, “they are not being ‘pushed’ in their output” (Swain, 1985: 249).

Other studies conducted by researchers such as Naiman (1978), Strong (1983) and Peck (1985) provide evidences that more production and more correct production go hand in hand with target language proficiency, which gives support to Swain’s (1985) comprehensible Output Hypothesis.

Swain’s Output Hypothesis also emphasizes the importance of feedback. She believes that learners can improve the accuracy of output if they receive feedback from their teachers.

So language teachers, playing very important role during the process of language learning, should manage to push the students to produce the target language, give more opportunities and much more time to the students to practice besides they offer adequate input.

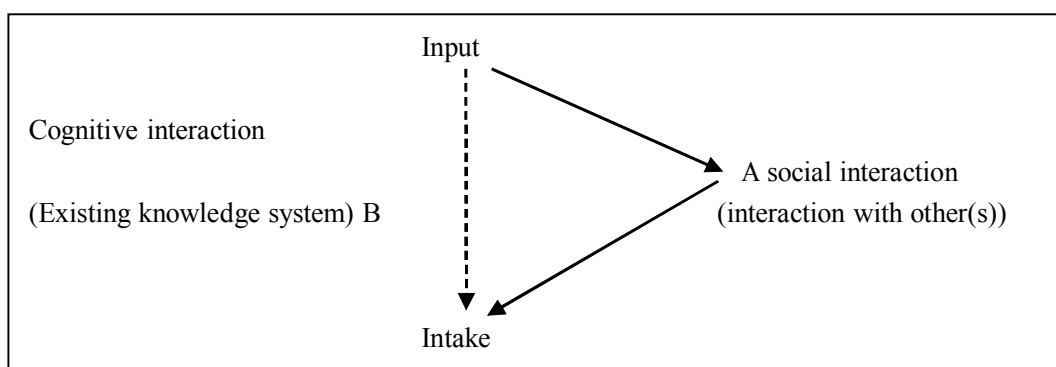
2.3.3 Classroom interaction and SLA

A common theme underlying different methods of language teaching is that second language learning is a highly interactive process (Richards & Lockhart, 2000:138). In recent years, a great deal of researches (Allwright, 1984; Ellis 1990; Long, 1983; Swain, 1985) in the field of L2 acquisition reveals to a great extent the importance of classroom interaction that involves both input and output. The Interaction Hypothesis claims that it is in the interaction process that acquisition occurs: learners acquire through talking with others (Johnson, 2002: 95). According to Allwright and Ellis, classroom teaching should be treated as interaction. Now it is clear that the language used in classroom affects the nature of the interaction, which in turn affects the opportunities available for learning, the study of interaction is therefore critical to the study of language classroom learning.

Van Lier (1988) points out: if the keys to learning are exposure to input and meaningful interaction with other speakers, we must find out what input and interaction the classroom can provide... we must study in detail the use of language in the classroom in order to see if and how learning comes about through the different ways of interaction in the classroom.

He also pointed out that interaction is essential for language learning which occurs in and through participation in speech events, that is, talking to others, or making conversation (Van Lier, 1988:77-78).

In the following diagram, he suggests that interaction mediates between input and intake. Most important and central is the interaction with others in meaningful activities, but as a complement, and perhaps partial replacement, the learner's cognitive apparatus



may also interact directly with the available input or sections.

Figure 2.2 The role of interaction (Van Lier, 1988:93)

Ellis (1985) points out: classroom instruction, both in the form of meaningful interaction, and in the form of linguistic rules, may influence the rate of acquisition. Teachers can influence the kind of interaction that occurs in their own classrooms. Successful outcomes may depend on the type of language used by the teacher and the type of interactions occurring in the classroom.

Fillmore (Ellis, 1985:160) is one of the researchers to have investigated how classroom interaction affects the rate of SLA. Fillmore compared the progress of the sixty L2 learners in different classrooms. She found that neither the difference in

classroom composition (mixed English-speaking and no-English speaking only) nor the difference in the type of teaching offered ('open' or 'teacher-directed') influences the success of language learning when considered separately. The availability of facilitative discourse types is not entirely dependent on the type of classroom organization adopted by the teacher. Pupils will learn most successfully when they are given ample opportunities to interact in conversation. So in this sense, we can say how a lesson progresses and whether it is successful largely depend on the interaction between the students and the teacher.

Classroom interaction is mainly realized by IRF (teachers' initiate-students' respond-teachers' feedback) structure. In this model, teachers often initiate interaction by asking questions. Teachers' questions not only can create more interaction activities, but can prompt students to participate in all kinds of negotiation of meaning. Negotiation makes input comprehensible and promotes SLA. The result of the negotiation of meaning is that particular types of input and interaction result (Ellis, 1985:142). Teachers carry out all his teaching tasks by teacher talk, an understanding of the aspects of teacher talk and their functions in the classroom interaction is, therefore, very important.

2.3.4 Conclusion

All of the above theories reveal the effects of different types of classroom interaction on L2 acquisition from different perspectives. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn from these theories, that is, a FL classroom that can facilitate learners' language learning should have the following features:

1) Providing opportunities for learners to communicate in the target language and enable them to learn the target language through meaningful use of it.

2) Providing optimal comprehensible input for learners through classroom communication. Both teachers and learners make an effort to make their speech comprehended by using communicative strategies.

3) Negotiation of meaning is encouraged. Teachers are expected to initiate learners to reorganize their language by using interactional modifications when problems occur

in communication (Zhou & Zhou, 2002).

Then, do the classrooms under the investigation have the features presented above? Teacher talk is not only the tool that teachers use to impart knowledge, but the most important means to control the classroom. The research on teacher talk provides us with an ideal perspective to investigate and understand what is really going on in EFL classrooms.

Chapter 3 A Case Study of Teacher Talk

This study is undertaken to find out the functional features of TT in college English classrooms and their effect on learners' language learning. The research subjects who are studied are teachers in Chongqing Normal University, to be more exact, 4 teachers who teach the second-year and third-year English-major students intensive reading English in Foreign Language School. The author has strong interest in finding out the features of these teachers' talk and the roles they play in the classrooms. Thus in this thesis, the qualitative method and quantitative method are used to analyze teacher talk in English classrooms in universities.

3.1 Research questions

Although studies of teacher talk are numerous in western cultural settings, such studies of teacher talk in Chinese cultural setting are extremely scarce in China. What are the features of teacher talk in our country? Do they satisfy the students' expectation? Do they prompt the students' foreign language learning? For such a purpose and for providing some suggestions for Chinese English language teachers, based on the principles and facets we have discussed in previous chapters, the present study is designed to answer the following questions:

Question 1:

What's the amount of teacher talk and student talk and the impact of teacher talk time on students' language learning in the foreign language classroom under investigation?

Question 2:

What's the frequency of display questions and referential questions used by different teachers in different classes? What's the impact of teachers' questions on language learning?

Questions 3:

What's the frequency of different types of teachers' assessment? In what ways will teachers give feedback to students when their errors occur?

3.2. Subjects

Teachers

In this research, 4 excellent teachers in Chongqing Normal University were treated as subjects, who teach juniors and sophomores intensive reading respectively in Foreign Language School. The teachers are all Chinese aged from 29 to 50, and they had at least five years of foreign language teaching experience, each of them is regarded as an excellent teacher in Chongqing Normal University. So they can represent the main constituents of the teaching faculty. In the following parts, they are represented as T1, T2, T3, and T4 respectively.

T1 is a female teacher with over 15 years teaching experience. T2 is a male teacher, like T1, who also has more than 10 years teaching experience. T3 is also a male teacher at the age of 37, his teaching experience is about ten years. T4 is a young female with 5 years teaching experience, she also has a M.A. degree.

Students

Because students' learning needs are considered in this study, so a questionnaire was used as a necessary research tool in order to get more complete and detailed data. 80 students studying in the four subject teachers' classes were involved. 40 sophomores from 2 classes and 40 juniors from 2 classes responded to the questionnaire. All the students are Chinese aged from 19 to 22. They had studied English for 6 years in junior and senior middle schools and for one year and two years respectively as university students. They are used to the ritual of language teaching in college and quite familiar with the teaching style of their teachers. The average size of each class varied from 35-40 students. *English Book*, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, has been used for many years as English major textbook, and is awarded as "excellent

teaching textbook” by China’s Ministry of Education.

3.3 Research methods and instruments

As the purpose of the present study is to find out and describe the typical features of teacher talk when teachers give lectures to English majors in classroom setting, as a result, methods like an investigation among students and a case study of teachers are utilized. In this sense, this research is naturalistic in nature. Hence, a research method called “naturalistic inquiring” (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) is adopted to investigate what is really going on in foreign language classroom. “Naturalistic inquiry” refers to that the researcher tries not to intervene in the research setting and does not try to control naturally occurring events, because the research wishes to describe and understand the process rather than to test specific hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationship. Therefore, naturalistic inquiry is holistic, heuristic and low in control. The present study holds the functional features of TT.

The feasibility and effectiveness of study must be ensured by the quality of the data gathering and data analysis, that is, the validity and reliability of the research. Validity includes external validity and internal validity. External validity is concerned with generalisability. In this study, the characteristics found across the data from the 4 subjects will serve as a basis for making universal inferences about teacher talk for a wider population of the same background. In this sense, the external validity of this research is assured. Internal validity refers to the extent to which one has really observed what one set out to observe. According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), three criteria can be used to judge internal validity, that is, representativeness, retrievability, and conformability. Representativeness relates to the degree to which collected data represent the reality, and it is closely linked with the means of data gathering. Classroom observation and audio-recording are the main devices in this study. During classroom observation, the researcher observed the teaching sequence without informing the subject teachers in advance. So aspects of the teachers’ performance in the classroom are recorded completely naturally. Therefore, the data gathered are representative of the

normal practices of the subjects. As for the retrievability, all the speech made by the teachers are recorded and are transcribed, which make the original data accessible for later inspection. Conformability is ensured by carrying out triangulation which demonstrates the same findings through other sources. For this purpose, a questionnaire is prepared for the students in the subjects' classes to respond. Then the two sources of information can be studied correlatively so that we can get a thorough understanding of the foreign language classroom teacher talk. Reliability refers to the consistency and replicability, therefore, the reliability of this study is ensured.

The following are the methods used in this study.

1) Classroom observation and classroom tape-recording. The whole process of teaching was tape-recorded to reflect what actually happens in classroom. Actually, twelve periods of lessons and 6 teachers' classroom talk were recorded and transcribed, among which, four periods of lessons taught by 4 teachers respectively were chosen randomly. After the class, a detailed transcription of the recording was worked out and then we got a comprehensive written record of the 4 periods of lessons to be analyzed statistically. After the data were transcribed, the teacher talk was located and analyzed with regard to the three research questions which the study set out to address.

The reason for choosing the case study is that classroom is a special and restricted setting. It is not possible to select so many teachers randomly to be in one class or another because of the huge task of detail analysis, and it is also impossible to control all the variables that might influence the outcome in a large-scale study.

2) Questionnaire. Considering this limitation of contingency and unilateralness of the sample of the four lessons and in order to investigate learner's preference towards teacher talk and their evaluation about their teachers' talk, the author also designed a questionnaire adapted from Richards, J. & Lockhart (1994:20) (see Appendix) to collect information on language learners' assessment about their English classes and their teachers' speech on the basis of their usual, normal activities. This questionnaire is composed of 16 items in the terms of the research questions. This questionnaire is used as a subsidiary research tool with the aim to reflect from another perspective what the

teacher speech really is. While doing statistical analysis, the analytic results of the transcription of recorded materials are compared with those gained from the questionnaire, in order to describe teacher talk more accurately and make the research valid. A total of 80 students were asked to respond to the questionnaire and 80 students' data were considered valid and adopted for the statistical analysis.

3.4 Results and discussion

3.4.1 Results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed to investigate the students' preference toward the ideal TT on the aspects: the amount of TT, teachers' questions and teachers' feedback. The questionnaire data, revealing very high percentage in several question items and indicating students actually expectation toward the ideal TT, are presented in the following table (Table 3.1) and histograms (Figure 3.1).

The following table reveals the students' expectation toward their teachers talk time during the period of class time (45 minutes).

Table 3.1 The results of the questionnaire about TTT (question 1-2)

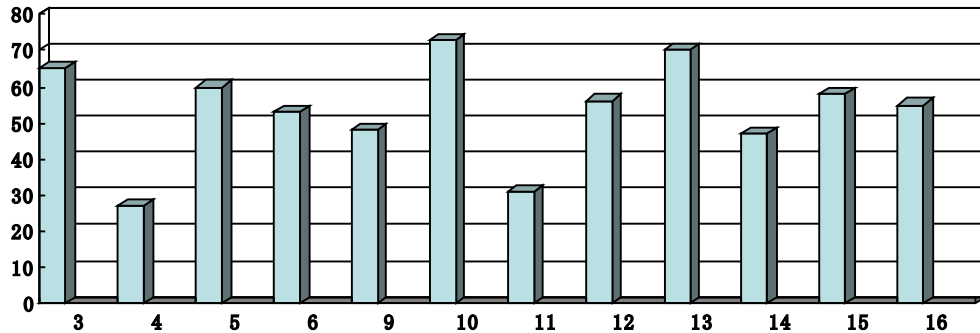
Appropriate t(min.)	Less than 20	20-25	25-30	30-35
Students number	16	44	12	8
Percentage	20%	55%	15%	10%

From the raw and percentage result of questionnaire, we can see that most of the students (75%) believe that the appropriate teacher talk time should be less than 25 minutes. As a result, a considerable number of students think their teachers talk far more than they expect. Among them, 32 students have a strong desire to minimize TTT and show the strong desire for participation; they expect to have more opportunities to

practice the target language according to the last question -- please give your suggestions on your English class.

12 questions are plotted along the baseline, and the numbers are plotted along the vertical axis, the height of each bar corresponds to the number of subjects in the interval.

Figure 3.1



Since each question is designed in terms of one particular behavior, the height of each bar shows the number of subjects who prefer it. These language behaviors, which have reached over 50% percentage of subject students' satisfaction will definitely indicate the majority preferences. The followings are summary of those behaviors and events which are welcomed by the subject students in their classroom learning.

Question 3 I like to listen to teacher's instruction.

Question 5 I like to be asked and answer the questions in class.

Question 6 I like the teacher to give us some problems to work on.

Question 10 I like to be encouraged by teacher's praise.

Question 12 I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.

Question 13 I like to be pointed immediately when my answers are incorrect.

Question 15 I like to be given more chances to talking and discussing in class.

Question 16 I like teachers should negotiate with me for correction.

According to the histograms, most of the students like to listen to teachers' instruction and view it as a good learning strategy. But they do not like teachers to explain everything to them. Towards teachers' question, 75% students like to be asked and answer the questions in class (Question 5). 60% students like their teacher to give

them some problems to work on. 47.5% students like to be volunteers to answer questions, 32.5% students prefer the way in chorus, only 20% students like to be named. 75% students like referential questions. All the data support the result of Table 1 and indicate most of students have the strong desire for participation.

All the students expect the teachers' praise and 91% of them like to be encouraged by teachers' feedback. When they make mistakes, 87.5% students hope to be pointed out immediately. However most of them don't like to be corrected directly, 70% of them expect the teacher to give them a clue and correct their errors by themselves or negotiate with them for correction.

3.4.2 Results of research question 1

In correspondence with Research Question 1 presented at the beginning of this chapter, we administered statistical analyses based on the transcription of classroom recording and the questionnaire.

The results concerning the time occupied by teacher talk and student talk in interaction and their percentage in the total 45 minutes (a period of class) are presented as Table 3.2.

The findings illustrated in Table 4.1 are in line with the findings by Zhao Xiaohong (1998) and Cook (2001), in which teacher talk occupied a greater amount of class time. Among the four subject teachers, three teachers' talk time occupy over 67% of the period of the class, only one teacher, T2 talk less, occupy 58% of the total class time. Obviously, the result is in contrast with the students' expectation towards TTT. This result shows that most of the teachers are still influenced by Grammar-translation Method which was commonly used for hundreds of years. Teachers dominate the classes and are the centers of the classes while students are totally passive and have few opportunities to speak.

Table 3.2 Amount of teacher talk and student talk and the percentage in the total class time

Teachers	Teacher talk	Student talk	Other activities
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	t(min.)	%	t(min.)	%	t(min.)	%
T1	30	67	12	27	3	6.7
T2	26	58	14	31	5	11
T3	40	87	5	11	0	0
T4	38	84	7	16	0	0

Note: “other activities” refers to those classroom activities such as dictation, reading the text silently, writing in classrooms, etc., in which neither teachers nor students need to speak.

Through observing the four classes, two phenomena can be observed: in the classes taught by T1, T2 and T3, the more the teacher talk, the duller the classroom atmosphere. Some students are not active and can not focus their attention on the class. Compared with the three classes, the atmosphere in T2’s class are more interesting and active, there are more communication between students and the teacher. Students participated in teaching activities actively.

The results in the investigation suggest TTT should be minimized.

3.4.3 Results of research question 2

Teacher questions have been the focus of research attention for many years. A great amount of documents and analyses explain their attraction for some researchers. As we have discussed in Chapter 2, the role of teacher’s question in facilitating language learning in classroom is very important. Therefore, in this section, we aim to answer the following questions:

How many display questions and referential questions are used by different teachers in different classes? What is the pattern of the teacher’s questions? What is the impact of teacher’s questions on students’ language learning? All the answers to the above questions will be found in the following analyses.

3.4.3.1 The frequency of display questions and referential questions

The frequency of display questions and referential questions is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Frequency of display questions and referential questions and the percentage in the total sum

Teachers	Display questions		Referential questions	
	No.	%	No.	%
T1	47	92%	4	7.8%
T2	42	89%	5	11%
T3	3	100%	0	0
T4	8	100%	0	0
Totals	101	92%	9	8.1%

From Table 3.3 we can see that there is a preference for display questions over referential questions in the classes under this investigation. Though the subject teachers vary in many aspects, they share the similarities and common tendency in teaching. Most of the questions they use are display questions, they ask the questions and students answer them or they explain something and elicit students' response or production. They use questions for the following purpose: to check or test understanding, knowledge or skill; to get learners to review and practice previously learnt material. Most of the time they use questions to check or test the students' understanding about the text and the knowledge, not to stimulate thinking or to probe more deeply into issues; According to the Output Hypothesis we have mentioned in Chapter 2, the teachers' questions can not help the students learning effectively.

In the classes under the investigation, the teachers' questions have such a tendency: most of the teachers mainly focus on the students' literal understanding about the text such as the words, phrases, sentences and fixed expressions, and neglect to let students practice language through using them. According to the theories discussed in Chapter 2, this will hinder the development of students' language ability. This finding is in line with

Zhao Xiaohong's (1998).

Because referential questions are beneficial to the development of students' communicative competence, so teachers should use more referential questions. Since answering questions is often regarded as a way of practicing the language, students are generally expected to participate actively, which can get a definite support from the questionnaire concerning this aspect. Through items as Question 5, which check if the learners prefer to be asked questions and we can see from it that 73% students have a preference to be asked. Among them, 60% students have a strong desire to be asked. Question 8, which check what kind of questions they like, showed 75% students like referential questions. This indicates their strong desire for participation and higher expectation toward the opportunity of speaking English, just like the results of the questionnaire showed. So teachers should try to direct their questions to the whole class and make sure that every student has the opportunity to participate in.

3.4.3.2 The distribution of teacher's questions

Through the classroom observation, we can find teachers direct their questions to nearly all the students in the class. 78% of the students admit that their teachers distribute their questions to most of the students. This result refutes the finding that the teacher is likely to restrict the questions to a limited few (Richards, J. & Lockhart, 2000). It is generally considered desirable to distribute questions among all students to keep them engaged in interaction and keep them alert to respond. This result may imply that the EFL classroom we investigated is beneficial to L2 learning in this aspect.

Generally, in English classrooms, teachers always let students answer their questions in four ways: 1) nominating; 2) chorus-answering; 3) volunteering; 4) teacher self-answering. Question 7 -- I like to answer the questions in this way, indicates the students' favorite way to answer questions involved this research: 32.5% (26 persons) students prefer to answer questions in chorus; 20% students (16 persons) like to be named by their teachers; 47.5% students (38 persons) like to be volunteers. This result shows a large number of students prefer volunteering, over half of the students like to

answer in chorus, and only 20% students like to be named. The following table is the result we observed in the classrooms.

From this table, we can see that volunteering is more frequent than other ways. This can get support from the questionnaire. On the surface, it is a good phenomenon, but because the volunteers are those who are active or with better English proficiency, it will hinder other students' development. Teachers always prefer nominating. But too much nominating will make students more passive. Sometimes, in order to save time, teachers often answer the questions by themselves. But in this way, students will become more dependent on teachers. They expect to receive information passively instead of thinking about them actively. In addition, the classroom atmosphere will be duller. So how teachers use various question patterns properly to prompt language learning is still a question that all teachers should pay attention to as well as to be studied.

Table 3.4 The result of question patterns and the percentage in the total sum

Teacher	Total No. of Qs	Norminating		In chorus		Volunteering		Self-answer	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
T1	51	6	11.8	15	29.4	3	5.9	27	52.7
T2	47	11	23.4	8	17	20	42.6	8	17
T3	3	0	0	1	33.3	2	66.7	0	0
T4	8	1	12.5	4	50	2	25	1	12.5

3.4.4 Results of research question 3

Providing feedback on performance of the students is probably one of the most commonly conceived classroom functions of teachers. For many years, behaviorist-inspired research has found that positive feedback is much more effective than negative feedback in changing student behavior. According to Nunan (1991), positive feedback has two principal functions: to let students know that they have performed correctly, and

to increase motivation through praises. First of all, we try to find out which type of the praise is most frequently used. And then, we attempted to investigate the frequencies of the use of four ways of error treatment.

3.4.4.1 Types of assessment and their frequency

Table 4.5 presents two types of assessments and the percentage of their use in the total sum of praises. As can be seen, first, “repetition of responses followed by praises” is the most frequently used way by the teachers, amounting to 50%; second, the way of “short and simple praises” which amounts to a percentage of 43.3% is also used significantly. In addition, both of these two types of praises are used significantly more often than the type of “praises followed by appraisals”, which only has a frequency of 6.7%. No negative assessment can be found in the classrooms. These findings might suggest that it is very likely that students in this study receive more effective feedback which will increase their motivation and encourage them in using the target language.

Table 3.5 Types of assessments and the percentage in the total sum

Teachers	Positive assessment						Negative assessment	
	Short and simple praises		Repetition of responses followed by praises		Praises followed by appraisals			
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
T1	3	33.3	5	55.6	1	33.3	0	0
T2	7	54.2	4	33.3	1	8.3	0	0
T3	2	66.7	1	33.3	0	0	0	0
T4	1	16.7	5	83.3	0	0	0	0
Totals	13	43.3	15	50	2	6.7	0	0

The actual teachers' feedback can satisfy the students' expectation showed in Questionnaire. A majority of students (91%) believe that their teachers usually provide positive feedback to them in classroom while only 9% of the students think that the teachers provide negative feedback, which is significantly low. In addition, none of the students hope to be criticized by the teacher.

3.4.4.2 Error correction

In this part, we aimed to investigate four ways of treating student errors, namely, "explicit corrections", "asking another student to answer instead", "providing a clue and expecting self-repair", and "ignoring and correcting later". The results are presented as Table 4.6. It can be noted that the frequency of the use of explicit corrections is strikingly high. It is used significantly more often than the other three methods of error treatment. On the contrary, insignificant use can be found in the method of "providing a clue and expecting self-repair" and "asking another student to answer instead".

The most striking finding in this part is that the use of "ignoring and correcting later" has been shunned by the teachers in this study. It might suggest that university teachers in this sample are more likely to interfere and not to give time to the students to make sense of their "mistakes". Generally speaking, teacher's immediate and explicit corrections as conventionally delivered breed a dependency relationship between teacher and learners, and this will inhibit them from elaborating further and developing exercises that foster progress and thus inhibit learners' attempts at using the target language.

Table 3.6 Frequency of error correction and the percentage in the total sum

Teachers	Explicit corrections		Asking another student to answer instead		Providing a clue and expecting self-repair		Ignoring and correcting later	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
T1	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0

T2	7	70	0	0	3	30	0	0
T3	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
T4	1	25	1	25	2	50	0	0
Totals	11	57.8	2	10.5	6	31.6	0	0

The results from the analysis of the recording material can get support from the questionnaire. The result gotten from Question 13 indicates that 87.5% students like to be corrected immediately in the classroom, only a few students (12.5%) express their disagreement. Moreover, a significantly number (70%) of students expect to be given a clue and correct their errors by themselves, that is, they expect self-repair. Therefore, explicit correction and self-repair are deemed as the two most desirable ways of error treatment. Quite different from the teacher, a few students hope teachers to ignore errors and correct them later.

3.5 Discussion

3.5.1 The impact of TTT on learners' language learning in FLC

As we have discussed in Chapter 3, the amount of teacher talk influences learners' L2 acquisition or learning. According to the Input Theory and Swain's Output Hypothesis, the learners must be pushed to produce the target language when they receive a certain amount of the language. So there is a continuing debate about the amount of time teachers should spend talking in class and there is no a definite answer.

Teachers usually exert their control over students by using their talk. If teachers moderate their control by cutting their talk time, the students will be encouraged to contribute more to the discourse. Therefore, excessive teacher talk should be avoided (Nunan, 1991:190) to give learners more opportunities for producing comprehensible output themselves. Harmer (2000:4) points out: "getting students to speak -- to use the language they are learning -- is a vital part of a teacher's job. Students are the people who need the practice, in other words, not the teacher. Therefore, a good teacher maximizes

STT and minimizes TTT.”

American scholar Wong-Fillmore (Hu Xuewen, 2003) holds that the amount of time teachers should spend talking in class is related to the students' language proficiency. She found, in primary language classrooms, that is, when the students have low-level language proficiency, all the success in SLA occurred in teacher-fronted classes. Fillmore therefore suggested two conditions to ensure successful SLA in classrooms from the 40 classes she investigated: one is that the students must have high-level language proficiency so that they can communicate with their teacher and among themselves; the other is that there must be enough students who want to communicate in class. If the two conditions do not exist in classrooms, the decrease of teacher talk time won't lead to successful language learning.

In the present research, the subject students have been studying the target language for at least six years and have certain communicative competence. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire show clearly that most of the subject students have a strong desire for speaking and talking more in classrooms. This indicates that the two conditions put forward by Fillmore exist in our college classrooms. Therefore, teachers should offer more opportunities for students to practice the target language, to push them output. That is, teachers should maximize STT. But the results of Research Question 1 show that generally there is a predominance of teacher talk over student talk in the classrooms we studied. This result is quite in line with that of Pica & Long's (Chaudron, 1988) study, Zhao's (1998) study, in which teacher talk occupied a greater amount of class time. However it is in sharp contrast with the findings of Zhou & Zhou's, in which student talk surpassed teacher talk. The results of the present investigation reveal that teachers dominate the classrooms and control what is going on tightly. Over-used teacher talk suggests that student talk is neglected. The students have little opportunity to practice and just learn passively. The results in this research imply that the environment in the classroom is not beneficial to the learners' learning.

It is no doubt that teachers should decrease their talk time in college classrooms. Another question is what the appropriate teacher talk time is. TTT should not be

minimized blindly. A classroom with too much TT is not certainly one that most teachers and students would approve of. Conversely, a class where the teacher seems reluctant to speak is not very attractive either. The best lessons are ones where STT is maximized, but where at appropriate moments during the lesson the teacher is not afraid to summarize what is happening, tell a story, enter into discussion etc. Good teachers use their common sense and experience to get the balance right (Harmer, 2000).

3.5.2 The influence of teacher's questions on learner's learning

Research Question 2 reveals that in the lessons under this investigation, there is a tendency for the teacher to employ more display questions (92%) than referential questions (8.1%). This is evident in the statistically significant predominance of display questions over referential questions. It is interesting to compare this finding with those findings from other studies.

The finding supports the conclusion made by Long & Sato (1983b: 217), Pica & Long (1996) and Zhao (1998), but is quite different from that made by Zhou & Zhou (2002). In Long & Sato's, Pica & Long's and Zhao's study, they found teachers use more display than referential questions in the classroom. Therefore, Long & Sato drew a conclusion that the second language classroom offered very few opportunities for the learner to practice genuine communicative uses of the target language. Pica & Long drew a similar conclusion that there was less negotiation of meaning in classroom settings and suggested that, as a result, there was less target language output. Zhao suggests teachers should use more referential questions because referential questions can offer more opportunity for learners to practise the target language. In a study undertaken by Brock (1986), he found that higher frequencies of referential questions asked by teachers would have some effects on classroom discourse: students' responses to display questions would be shorter and syntactically less complex than their responses to referential questions; confirmation checks and clarification requests by the teacher would occur more frequently following referential questions than following display questions, and this would lead to more negotiation of meaning which is crucial to the target

language acquisition. Nunan (1987) reports a study that is similar to Long's (1984). A teacher was encouraged to focus on the use of referential questions in a communicative language lesson in order to relate the content of the lesson to the students' own life. Nunan reported that "the effect was immediately apparent".

Zhou & Zhou found that teachers use significantly more referential than display questions in the student-centered classrooms. The high-frequency use of referential questions suggests that there is a dominance of two-way flow of information over one-way flow of information in classrooms in their study. One-way flow of information involves giving information from one participant to another (usually from teachers to students). However, two-way flow of information (from teachers to students and vice versa) involves exchanges of information, with each participant holding information crucial to the success of communication. Long (1983a) predicts that more modified interaction in the two-way flow of information would occur, as opposed to the one-way flow of information. The two-way flow of information held by Long (1980) and his associates is a necessary condition for the "negotiation of meaning", which, in turn, is held to be a prerequisite for target language development.

The high-frequency use of display questions suggests the lack of two-way flow of information in classrooms. Teachers exert a tightly control over students by initiating display questions, therefore, students have few opportunities to initiate, to communicate with teachers or other students. According to the result we have observed in this study, the technique of teachers' question does not contribute to students' language learning.

3.5.3 Teachers' feedback and their impact on learner's language learning

Researches have found that positive feedback is much more effective than negative feedback in changing student behavior. Brophy (1981) provides guidelines for effective praise in his functional analysis of feedback. However, Nunan (1991:197) suggests that much of the feedback provided by teachers often seems to be rather automatic. In a lesson from which a sequence of feedback such as "Good", "Okay", "All right", "Very good", "Right", "What?" was taken, the positive feedback was thought of being made up

of short interjections of “Good”, “Okey”, etc. Meanwhile, negative feedback consisted exclusively of the teachers’ repetition of the student’s response with a rising intonation, which reveals that high-achieving students were more likely to be praised following a right answer while low-achieving students were praised much less frequently. Likewise, low achievers were more likely to be criticized for wrong answers. Ur (2000) argued that though positive feedback tends to encourage, very frequent approval will lose its encouraging effect. Negative feedback, if given supportively and warmly, will be recognized as constructive, and will not necessarily discourage.

In correspondence to Research Question 3, the distribution of three types of praises is found out and illustrated. Findings in the present study reveal that there is a preference of “repetition of responses followed by praises” and “short and simple praises” over “praises followed by appraisals” by the teachers examined. While the former two account for the majority (50% and 43.3%) of the total number, the latter only account for 6.7%. These results lend some support to Numan’s finding that teachers’ feedback seems to be rather automatic. It is suggested that praises in general terms and in an automatic way will not achieve a good effect on learners. It is also interesting to note that in regard to the frequency of the short and simple praises, the finding in our study is inconsistent with that of Zhou & Zhou (2002). In their study, they found that short and simple praises only account for a small part of the total number of praises. Such an inconsistency may be explained as that some teachers may deem it a convenient and time-saving way to provide such a feedback in classrooms.

It is noteworthy that one of the most effective way of praise -- “praises plus appraisals”, holds a significantly low frequency. Nevertheless, this kind of praise should be encouraged to be used by teachers when they offer feedback to learners. According to Brophy (1981), specifying the particulars of learners’ accomplishment, suggesting clear attention to learners’ accomplishment, providing information to learners about their competence or the values of their accomplishments, etc. are all effective praises, and play a crucial role in encouraging students to use the target language.

As for the treatment of errors, it is obvious in the finding that teachers correct

immediately once students' errors occur. However, this is a way which is not recommended by many researchers. Gattegno (1972: 31), for example, contends that he never corrects learners but only throws them back onto themselves to elaborate further their criteria, and against a common teachers' demand for immediate correctness he tries not to interfere. By doing this he gives time to a student to make sense of "mistakes" and to develop exercises that foster progress. Although there are evidences that learners expect corrective feedback, the findings of many studies do not advocate systematic error correction.

But the results of the questionnaire show that students prefer "explicit correction" mostly, "self-repair" is the second desired way of error correction. As for "ignoring and correcting later", only 5% of the students report that it is desired. This statistical insignificance seems to refute what Gattegno contends, as discussed above.

Chapter 4 Cause Analysis and Implications

4.1 Cause analysis for the results in the present study

The results of the present study show that the classrooms under this investigation are teacher-dominated classroom. There are certain reasons for the prevailing of the teacher-dominated classroom talk in China.

4.1.1 Cultural background

The learning situation has not been separated or isolated from the total context (Reid, 2002:4). In China, both teachers and students have been greatly influenced by the cultural tradition, mostly by the Confucian tradition. The relationship between teacher and student is much more hierarchical. The teacher is more directive in making decisions about what goes on in the classroom. That is, the teacher is an authority figure and has great power in controlling the class. Confucius taught that the teacher must know all and present knowledge in class, and the students are constrained to accept. It is like an ancient Chinese saying: “if a teacher for a day, a father for life.” Within the Confucian tradition, teachers play the role of authority and dominate the class mainly through their talk, while students are passive receivers and more inclined to believe what the teachers say instead of trying to work out their own answers or to solve the problems by themselves. They believe the teacher should be the instructor and knowledge transmitter in class. So they are used to learning by the teachers’ instruction.

4.1.2 Class size

In China, an English class usually has a big size. What can a teacher do with over forty, fifty students? In this research, there are more than forty students in each class. That will leave no more than about a minute for each student during the average session, so it is hard to arrange the practice of speaking. Besides, certain other rules have to be observed in classroom setting, for example, one speaker at a time, rather than many at

once. The classroom is characteristically reluctant to allow overlapping or simultaneous talk because of the requirement for centralizing attention. The more students a class contains, the more difficult it is for the teacher to control class activities.

4.1.3 Focus on the results of examinations

In China, the educational system emphasizes examinations. Teachers are struggling for the balance between skill-oriented teaching and test-oriented teaching. Since the results of the examinations are used to assess the teachers' work, and the 4 skills of language learning -- listening, speaking, reading and writing have not been equally reflected in the testing and questions of test mainly are in the form of multiple choice, it seems to train the skills of testing is more important than to train other potentials. In most universities and colleges, the content of teacher talk is limited to the examination. The development of students' linguistic communicative competence is inevitably beyond the teachers' reach.

As for the students, they are eager to pass the examination as soon as possible, and hope their teachers adjust the teaching plan according to the examination which they have to pass. Therefore, the teaching content which is related to the examination is welcome in class. Teachers always explain more about the examination and neglect to train students' communicative competence. For example, the skills of listening and speaking are always neglected. There is less two-way flow of information in classrooms and teachers always talk too much.

4.1.4 Factors concerned with the learners

It is important to remember the teachers have a certain amount of power in the classroom, but learners also clearly influence the pace and direction of interaction. Learners have their preferences and utilize their own learning strategies and these sometimes run contrary to the teacher's plan. Different students with different personality do not have identical psychological process while learning English. Students' needs, motivation and learning factors influence their learning process. TT is inevitably

affected by what the students' believe. In China, students are used to the large amount of TT in all kinds of classes because of Chinese culture and background. They are inclined to keep the teacher talking. The students believe that they can learn something through TT, which is supported by the results of question 3 and 4. Otherwise, they may regard their teachers as lazy or not performing their duties.

4.1.5 The type of classes teachers give

English classes are often divided into different types. For English majors, the most common ones are intensive reading class, listening comprehension class, extensive reading class and oral class. The type of classes influences the amount of TT to a large degree. Generally speaking, many English teachers speak much more in intensive reading classes and listening comprehension class than in oral class. This phenomenon is determined by the nature of the course.

4.1.6 The limited teaching time

Through interviewing with the subject teachers, the teachers complained that the teaching time is so limited and so many teaching contents are required to be accomplished in the rather limited time. Students interaction are time-consuming. It is not allowed to let students talk more and ask them more referential questions in such a short period class time, or the required teaching content will not be achieved, whereas it will save much time through more teacher talk. Moreover, it is a highly demanding job to prepare and design the class activities which consumes time and energy. Teachers usually are overloaded and reluctant to do so.

4.1.7 Teachers' awareness toward TT

For many years, teachers and educational organizations have been interested in finding the right teaching method, and have not realized the importance of TT on language learning. When teachers prepare their lessons, traditionally, they always focus on the teaching method, and pay no attention to TT, not to mention the amount of TT, the

strategies of questioning and feedback. They restrict their talk to classroom language, fluent in saying “Let’s look at Page ...”, “Please answer the question” ..., etc. they don’t realized the role of TT in language classrooms. By the same token, the educational organizations always train teachers to find and use the right method, totally neglect to train them how to talk in classrooms. As a result, many teachers lack the related theories on TT. Chaudron (1988:174) found that the teachers receiving training in question types produced significantly more referential questions than the control teachers following training.

Besides, most teachers have been quite used to the traditional way to teach foreign language, which requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers and teachers are regarded as an authority who dominates the whole of the class.

4.2 Implications of the research for college English teaching

What we have been discussing provides some practical insight into college English classrooms. Based on the theories and the results discussed in this research, some implications for foreign language classroom are suggested, in order to make teacher talk more effective and more profitable for learners.

4.2.1 Shifting the teacher-centered classroom into student-centered classroom

The results of this research indicate that the classes under this investigation are still teacher-dominated class. Influenced by Chinese culture, the teachers still play the authority role and consider less the learners’ needs. Compared with the research by Zhou& Zhou (2002), which was conducted in student-centered classrooms, the student-centered classroom can provide more opportunities for students to practice the target language, thus can better prompt English language learning and teaching. So the teachers should change their belief, shifting the teacher-centered classroom into student-centered classroom.

It is worth noting that a learner-centered classroom is not one in which the teacher hand over power, responsibility, and control to the students in a unilateral way. Nor does

it involve devaluing the teacher. Rather, it is one in which students are actively involved in the whole learning process so that they can gradually assume greater responsibility for their own learning. Two suggestions for learner-centeredness are put forward here.

First of all, changing the role of teacher and establishing a new teacher- student relationship. Teachers are a medium of teaching. It is the teachers' responsibility to organize the classroom as a setting for classroom activities. Guidelines for classroom practice suggest that during an activity the teacher monitors, encourages and organizes the students and provides them with information of each particular course and strategy of learning. In addition to the two primary roles as organizers and facilitators, according to Richards (1995), teachers should fulfill the following roles: monitor, motivator, controller, provider, counselor and friend, needs analyst, materials developer, evaluator. By contrast, the students are viewed as a subject of teaching who play a creative role by responding to stimuli from the teacher.

Secondly, the students' needs should be taken into consideration. Teachers should have a better understanding of the students. Since the students play the main role in learning, teachers should care much about their needs, motivation, personal factors and their role in learning. Only when teachers and students work together as happy partners, only when we think of students as the most important ingredients in the teaching-learning process and adapt the teaching approaches to students and to their circumstances, can teachers manage teaching successfully.

All classroom activities are fulfilled through TT. TT, therefore, must serve, through the clear consciousness of the teacher, the teaching purpose and properly adopted according to the teaching needs.

4.2.2 Controlling TTT and focusing on the quality of teacher talk

The researches on TT have suggested that the amount and type of teacher talk are contributory factors to learners' target language proficiency. So teachers should pay much attention to the appropriate use of teacher talk. Some scholars suggest that teachers should minimize TTT. "As a general rule, we may say that the teacher should do no more

than 25 percent of the talking in class, and that the students should be permitted to do 75% of the talking” (Wright, 1975: 338). Harmer (2000) pointed out that the best lessons are ones where STT is maximized. Therefore, it is suggested that TTT should be decreased and STT should be increased.

But it is worth noting that teachers should not decrease the amount of teacher talk blindly. In this research, it is found that teacher talk is affected by many factors, such as the culture and the reality, as we have discussed in 4.1. Moreover, according to the Input Theory mentioned in Chapter 2, enough and accurate input is the preliminary to foreign language learning. In China, teacher talk is the main source that students receive target language input and in some cases the only source. As the main course of English majors, intensive reading class is the most important class for English majors to learn English language. It can be easily observed that teacher talk occupies much less time in other class types than in intensive reading class. According to what we have discussed, it is hard to draw a conclusion that too much teacher talk in intensive reading class is definitely positive or negative in Chinese context. This research suggests that teachers should prepare lessons carefully and control their talking time based on the teaching purpose and content. For example, when presenting new materials, teachers can spend much time on explanation; when doing exercises and discussion, STT can be increased. Good teachers should use their common sense and experience to keep the balance between TTT and STT right.

Besides the amount of teacher talk, the quality of teacher talk is much more important. Good learner performance depends on the teacher. “Errors in the input may be ‘acquired’ by listeners.” (Krashen, 1985: 9) “The purpose of language teaching in a sense is to provide optimal samples of language for the learner to profit from -- the best ‘input’ to the process of language learning. Everything the teacher does provide the learner with opportunities for encountering the language.” (Cook, 2000: 129) Teachers should focus on the quality of their talk and find appropriate forms of teacher talk to make their talk more effective, stimulating and interesting.

4.2.3 Improving questioning techniques

It is revealed in the case study that the teachers tend to ask more display questions, which serves to facilitate the recall of information and check the understanding of knowledge rather than to generate students' ideas and classroom communication. "Display questions tend to elicit short answers, learners supply the information for didactic purposes only, they would have less communicative involvement in producing a display response, and thus less motivational drive for using the target language." (Chaudron, 1988: 173) Brock found that the learners responded with significantly longer and more syntactically complex utterances to referential questions than to display questions. Mitchell et al.'s (Chaudron, 1988) correlational study of FFL classrooms has found a high positive correlation between learner proficiency and "speaking," yet low correlations with activities such as "imitation," "drill/exercise," and "transposition". When teachers use referential questions, students are more likely to produce complex target language structures and their output is more like that produced in naturalistic settings. Learners will attain a much higher proficiency. Therefore teachers are expected to employ more referential questions.

Referential questions can involve students in more negotiation of meaning between teachers and students. The theory of L2 acquisition holds that negotiation of meaning promotes TL acquisition and makes classroom interaction more communicative. Through this kind of communication, learners can get more opportunities to communicate and interact with each other, help each other in problem-solving tasks and attempt to make themselves understood. Thus, the English classroom can become a speech community in which the English teacher is an equal participant as well as an organizer, facilitator, etc. Thus, referential questions will not only arouse students' interests but help to develop their output -- their communicative ability. This implies that teachers should create a positive affective environment that will benefit negotiation of meaning and ask more referential questions.

4.2.4 Using proper feedback techniques

Positive feedback, as demonstrated in the present study, is not only preferred by the teacher involved in this examination but also receive a great deal of support from the students as the questionnaire reports. Negative feedback, on the other hand, receives almost no support from the students. Positive feedback is an effective technique for increasing motivation of foreign language learning. A teacher who provides encouraging feedback is much more likely to get students motivated to learn and to participate in class, and will help to create a warm, relax atmosphere in the classroom. It is believed that learners' confidence and courage will be fostered in a friendly atmosphere, and increasing motivation will encourage greater effort on the part of learners and as a result, a greater success in language performance. Therefore, teachers are expected to enhance learners' motivation through providing positive feedback wherever necessary. As achievement motivation theory demonstrates, when the learners' motive to achieve success is stronger, his interest in achievement-oriented activity would be increased; on the contrary, when the learners' motive to avoid failure is stronger, all interest in achievement-oriented activity would be inhibited (Oxford, 1990). So it is necessary for teachers to provide appropriate feedback to learners' classroom performances. When problems occur in learners' communication, teachers should encourage them to overcome these difficulties. Moreover, it should be attached great importance to the idea that negative feedback is an undesirable behavior for teachers to follow.

But it is worth noting that teachers should not only give positive feedback. It is true that positive feedback tends to encourage, but negative feedback, if given supportively and warmly, will be recognized as constructive, and will not necessarily discourage. Moreover, very frequent approval would lose its encouraging effect on learners' classroom behavior. The giving of praise can easily be devalued through overuse. Students come to expect it as a matte of course, cease to be particularly encouraged by it, and are hurt if it is not forthcoming. In fact, overused, uncritical praise can begin to irritate (Ur, 2000: 257). In general, both positive and negative feedback should be made available to the learners.

Error correction is a complex and important matter in language classroom for “a learner’s errors... are significant in [that] they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired...” Correction helps students to clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of language. It is a vital part of the teacher’s role. (Harmer, 2000:62)The matter of when, how and who correct errors has been a controversial issue and has no simple answer. We have to be careful that if we do it in an insensitive way, we can upset our students and dent their confidence (Harmer, 2000:62). The results from the research as well as the questionnaire indicate that the behavior of correcting errors immediately is the teachers’ preference as well as the students’, which provides an empirical support for Schmidt & Frota’s (cited from Zhou& Zhou, 2002) finding that the learners’ errors should be corrected immediately. As for the matter who corrects errors, the report from the questionnaire lends a definite support to this standpoint: a majority of students under investigation prefer self-repair when a mistake occurs and they are often reluctant to be corrected by teachers. This result is totally in line with Zhou & Zhou’s finding (2002) and also provides a further empirical support for Van Liver’s (1988) finding that learners’ self-repair is more beneficial for L2 acquisition than teacher’s immediate corrections.

Explaining to students that they have made a mistake is one of the most perilous encounters in the classroom. Therefore, error treatment has to be done with tact. Teachers have to measure what is appropriate for a particular student in a particular situation (Harmer, 2000:2).

4.2.5 Improving teachers’ awareness toward TT

There exist a lot of factors affecting teaching quality. For many years, teachers just focus on the learning of teaching methods and techniques. Most of them just follow or imitate the fashionable teaching method or technique. As a result, they only copy the superficial forms, but miss some essential elements of teaching. Teacher talk, the most important factor a successful class depends on, always be neglected. In the actual teaching, few teachers are aware of the importance of teacher talk and use it

unconsciously, they know little about the forms of teacher talk and most of them just follow other teachers. As we have discussed in Chapter 4, different forms of teacher talk bring different effects: positive feedback can create a warm, encouraging classroom atmosphere that prompts learners; referential questions can elicit students to produce more complex, meaningful sentences than display questions, thus lead them to attaining a much higher language proficiency. It was found that the teachers receiving training in question types produced significantly more referential questions than the control teachers following training. (Chaudron, 1988:174) So if teachers know much about teacher talk, and choose its appropriate forms consciously, the dull atmosphere in the classroom will disappear and the teaching quality will be improved.

Teachers should persist in the study of teaching and learning theory and place teacher-training in its proper place. At the same time, a good teacher must integrate the teaching theory with practice. Teacher talk is the medium to combine theory with classroom practice. It will contribute a lot to the successful classroom language teaching if teachers know about the theoretical knowledge including teacher talk.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 Findings and contributions

Few researches have examined classroom proceedings in details, and there are few descriptions on what actually goes on in classrooms. Especially learners' views of their language learning experiences, preference and evaluation of teacher talk are overlooked too. There are few descriptive evidence and close study on TT in English intensive reading class in the university.

This study tried to contribute something to the mentioned areas. Though it was just a small-scale exploration and the findings may reveal partial views of classroom research, it gives insight to the study of the Chinese foreign language classroom, and promotes the awareness of teachers toward using their language in classrooms.

Based on the fundamental principle of classroom research and the features of TT, the author first illustrates the main issues of current college English teaching in China from the perspective of TT. Then three questions of exploration are initiated. All steps of investigation and case study are centered on the three questions of exploration, with close consultation of a great deal instruments, and other literary references.

After the data analysis and interpretive analysis of the outcomes acquired in the investigation and the case study, findings in several aspects are finally led to.

First of all, students count a significant part of learning on teacher talk and their preferences towards to the ideal teacher talk greatly run contrary to the current college English teaching. For most students, teacher talk serves as the most valuable input of language exposure. They believed that learning from TT is one of the most effective learning strategies. But over half of the students believe teacher talk occupies too much of the class time at the present and should be decreased. They show their strong desire for participation in the interactional classroom activities. Discussion and practicing the new linguistic materials are welcomed. Most of the students agreed on the idea that errors should be corrected when they are produced in answers. They expect the positive feedback from teachers to encourage them.

Secondly, it is found that current college English teaching run contrary to the students' expectation and preferences. With its distinctive features, the English classroom is still the teacher-dominated one and students only play passive roles. Teacher talk, which manifested by series of rituals of questioning, feedback and talk time explored in this research, are found not only contradicts to the students' desire, but also to the teaching theories. In the case study, the amount of teacher talk occupies most of the class period. Most of the questions asked by the teachers are display ones, which focus on the linguistic knowledge instead of generating the interaction to foster communicative competence. As for the feedback and error correction, all teachers prefer positive feedback over negative feedback. But one effective way of praising, that is, praises followed by appraisals, is not used frequently in our study. The frequency of error treatment reveals that the controversial issue, namely, whether error being corrected immediately the moment it occurs or not, is not only preferred by most of the students but is used by the teachers in a high frequency.

Based on the results of the case study, the causes of the actual teacher talk we observed are analyzed, taking into consideration the culture background and reality in China. Thus some implications are suggested: 1) Shifting the teacher-centered classroom into student-centered classroom; 2) Controlling TTT and focusing on the quality of teacher talk; 3) Improving questioning techniques; 4) Using proper feedback techniques; 5) Improving teachers' awareness towards TT.

To summarize, the findings in the present study provide empirical evidence to insight into some aspects of TT in current college English classrooms. Thus teachers can reflect their behaviors embodied in TT and improve their teaching quality effectively.

5.2 Limitations and further study

The first limitation of the study comes from the limited population of the subjects. 80 freshmen and sophomores and 4 teachers involved in the study is too small a figure in relation to the whole population of some thousands of the staff and students. In addition, this research just covered three aspects of teacher talk, so this research does not provide

an insight from the all-round perspectives.

The following aspects deserve further research:

Firstly, more case studies on a large scale are needed to carry out, so more comprehensive, universal materials toward TT can be available.

Secondly, it is need to do a further research that is concerned with the other aspects of teacher talk besides the ones involved in this study, and more efforts should be paid in strengthening a more universal mode of teacher's awareness towards the teacher talk.

Thirdly, this tentative research just explores the relationship between TT and foreign language learning in college English classrooms. How TT affect students' learning in detail still needs further research.

To conclude, the present work does some research on certain aspects of teacher talk and the findings of it contribute to the investigation of foreign language teaching classrooms, though there exit some limitations in this research. As a crucial component of foreign language classrooms, the further research on teacher talk still has a long way to go and will contribute a lot to promoting teaching quality and facilitating FL learning.

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Appendix: Questionnaire for Students

Class _____ Grade _____ Date _____ Age _____
Gender _____

(Direction: This is just a part of research about how you can learn best in English classroom, which do no harm to anyone. Please answer carefully and objectively, helps from you will be highly appreciated. Thanks.)

1. I like that teacher talk time should be
A. 15-20 minutes B. 20 minutes C. 25-30minutes D. 35-40 minutes
2. Now in my classroom, I think teacher talk time is
A. less B. appropriate C. a little more D. much more
3. I like to listen to teacher's instruction (讲授).
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
4. I like the teacher to explain everything to me.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
5. I like to be asked and answer the questions in class.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
6. I like the teacher to give us some problems to work on.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
7. I like to answer the questions in this way:
A. in chorus B. being named C. volunteer

8. I like this kind of questions
A. with obvious, fixed answers B. without fixed answers
9. I like to be given longer time to think about the questions
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
10. I like to be encouraged by teacher's feedback (反馈).
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
11. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
12. I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
13. I like to be pointed immediately when my answers are incorrect.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
14. I like to practice the new language in class.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
15. I like to be given more chances to talking and discussing in class.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best
16. I like teachers should negotiate with me for correction.
A. no B. a little C. good D. best.
17. Please give your own suggestions on your English class.