



Keywords

Classroom Instructions,
Influence,
Teaching

Received: May 22, 2017

Accepted: July 11, 2017

Published: August 29, 2017

The Influence of Classroom Instructions on Teaching

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Citation

Hao Yang. The Influence of Classroom Instructions on Teaching. *International Journal of Modern Education Research*. Vol. 4, No. 3, 2017, pp. 10-14.

Abstract

Classroom instructional language, an important part of teacher talk, plays a significant role in English teaching. The classroom instructional language is an act that teachers used to ask or guide students to do something, such as a demand, a request, and a suggestion. In this paper, the author studies some aspects of classroom instructions, such as the definition, the features, the functions of the classroom instructions based on mediating theory, relevance theory, and speech act theory.

1. Introduction

In this research, the author mainly studied the classroom instruction which plays a great role in English teaching. In this chapter, the author gave a description on the purpose and importance of classroom instructions in details.

1.1. General Description of the Research

What the study concerns is the classroom instruction, one aspect of the interactions between teachers and students. Nowadays, there are many growing discussions upon the instructional language in English classes both at home and abroad, because it is not only an instrument for teachers to carry out the teaching plans, but also an important source of language input for students[1-3]. It is beneficial for the language acquisition of students.

What's more, the author observed other English teachers and found out the problems. For instance, some teachers seldom use the English instructions, they use Chinese instructions, and they always repeat instructions when students have started the tasks or activities. So, the author carried out questionnaires about this problem.

The classroom instructional language, an important link connecting students and teachers, occupies a lot of time in English classes. According to the analysis above, the author paid a lot of attention to the study of classroom instructions and others can know why the author chose the topic.

1.2. Purpose and the Importance of the Study

In this thesis, the author attempts to learn the current situation of the usage of classroom instructions through the questionnaires and class observations. The author makes the research with the purpose of finding out the linguistic and functional features of teachers' classroom instructions in English classes, the status of classroom instructions in English teaching, and the factors that influence the effective instructions. Classroom instructions have a great impact on students understanding and completion of classroom activities, and even influence teaching results of teachers and learning results of students. Therefore, studying classroom instructions is important for English teaching. And the study tries to provide answers for the following questions:

- 1) What are the features and functions of classroom instructions?
- 2) How do teachers and students understand classroom instructions?
- 3) What is the status quo of classroom instructions in English teaching?
- 4) What can influence the effective classroom instructions?
- 5) How to achieve the effective classroom instructions?

The importance of the study is to help teachers improve their own instructional language, organize their language teaching and promote students' language learning. Just as Williams and Burden pointed, how teachers adjust their own language effectively decides whether they can provide students with sufficient comprehensible input or not, and also decides whether they can assist students to make comprehensible output [4-5]. Good instructional language can make students understand and learn the tasks easily, and can also promote the students' motivations to accomplish the tasks and learn the language fast.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of six parts.

First chapter shows the background, the purpose, the importance, and the structure of the study.

The second chapter represents a series of studies of classroom instructions, such as the definition, the features, and the functions. The previous studies of classroom instructions are the other part in this chapter.

The third chapter expounds the relative theoretical bases, including mediating theory, relevance theory, and speech act theory.

The fourth chapter offers research questions, subjects, tools, data collection and data analysis, which prepares further data for the following chapters.

The fifth chapter states the main achievements in this study, and reveals the results in great details. According to the results, the author finds out teachers and students' understanding on classroom instructions and the influence of classroom instructions on English teaching. And also discusses the factors that lead to the ineffective classroom instructions and how to achieve the successful and effective classroom instructions.

The sixth chapter concludes this research, and provides some suggestions for how to achieve effective classroom instructions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classroom Instructions

Classroom instructions can start and stop the behavior of the students and can also organize the activities of classes. The author studied the definition, features, and functions of classroom instructions.

2.1.1. The Definition of CI

For Chinese students, the language environment is

important in English classes, so that teachers talk plays a great role in classes. Classroom instructional language is used by teachers to achieve the teaching purpose in English classes, and an act that teachers used to ask students to do something. It can also be used to guide the behaviors of students[6], and make further explanations help students complete tasks and activities.

The classroom instructional language is an act that teachers used to ask students to do something, such as a demand, a request, and a suggestion. The following is a simple example, "Turn to page 9, please." Additionally, classroom instructions have their special functions in the English teaching.

Summarily, the definition of CI is the following:

Classroom Instructions refer to the type of language teachers use to organize or guide learning. They include giving directions to tasks or activities, providing explanations to a concept or language structure, setting requirements, checking comprehension, drawing attention, motivating learners, giving feedback, and assigning homework, etc. Generally speaking, they include all classroom language that teachers may use for teaching purposes as well as for managing teaching.

2.1.2. The Features of CI

The classroom instructional language is well-defined. The following are the features of classroom instructions: four main parts, consisting of demands, requests, and suggestions, involving facial expressions, body gestures and some objects, being short, simple and full of regular pauses and with eye contact. The author described the following aspects in details.

Firstly, according to the definition above, classroom instructional language often consists of three parts, demands, requests, and suggestions in its form. For example, "Stand up" "Can you answer this question?" and "You should listen to the teacher carefully."

Secondly, when classroom instructions are used, many facial expressions, body gestures and some objects (pictures, maps, blackboard, etc.) are involved. When teachers express their meanings to students in words, at the same time, teachers may use pictures and gestures.

Thirdly, the classroom instructions are often short, simple and full of regular pauses. Teachers may use short and simple classroom instructions while avoid complex words and phrases. To make students understand the instructions easily, teachers can also add some regular pauses.

Fourthly, a good teacher always uses eye contact with students. Eye contact is a good way to interact with students, no words, no gestures. When a student is absent-minded, the teacher can use this way to remind him or her to pay attention to the teacher or the blackboard.

2.1.3. The Functions of CI

The classroom instructional language plays a great role in the processes of teachers organizing teaching plans and passing on knowledge throughout the whole classroom teaching and monitoring the classroom.

First, classroom instructions can provide both

comprehensible input and output for students. The study is to explain and to improve classroom instructions. Classroom instructions are like strings, combining the teaching methods and students' performances and help students complete activities and tasks. The effective instructions will make learning and teaching in a good match [8].

Second, classroom instructions can also promote the communications between teachers and students. Traditionally, there is a generation gap between students and teachers. The relationship has gain a special attention between scholars. Now, more and more people focus on the class communication, so it is stricter for the requirements of classroom instructions.

2.2. The Previous Studies of Classroom Instructions

Studies on classroom instructions have begun for years.

Yorkey made a study. He studied a kind of classroom instructions about demands on vocabulary activities. The commands given by teachers are not too clear, so the students attempted to complete the task. But the effect is not well. The result shows that the classroom instructions which are not too clear influence the effect of the activities.

The researcher studied a lot on the usage of English teaching at different standards of schools of China [9]. The research is based on the participants of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers from senior, junior schools and primary schools. Under the help of a language database retrieving system called Wordsmith, Professor He and her colleagues have studied the cognitive verbs and phrases of classroom instructional language. Their major findings are: 1) VP (verb phrases) in the lower level cognitive demanding activities which concentrates on drilling and root memory: repeat, follow, again, more, after, remember, once, and forget e.g. Remember + (sth). 2) VP in high level cognitive demanding activities which concentrates on active mental work: guess, comment, think, make up, imagine, attention, notice, e.g. Could you guess/make up... 3) Teachers' cognitive guidance in primary class is concentrated on crying and drilling; and still drilling but with a guessing orientation; however, in senior class, much less drilling but more thinking demand and opinion seeking.

Guo Linhua concentrated on forms and distributional characteristics of English teacher's classroom instructions in classrooms. The main results are: 1) Direct instructions: a. (You) VP (Please); b. Abbreviated directives; c. Let us... 2) Indirect instructions: a. Could/Can you...; b. Declarative: c. Interrogatives. 3) Teachers' usage of instructions relates with their students' proficiency, teacher' personality, and also teaching focus and methods. The percentage of using direct instructions decreases when the students' grade grows, while the percentage of using indirect instructions increases with it. It's not particularly obvious that the forms of instructions have an impact on classroom teaching, but the indirect instructions help strengthen the interaction and friendship between teachers and students.

3. Theoretical Bases

Theoretical basis is general, stable and fundamental and provides guidance for studies. The following theories are mediating theory, relevance theory and speech act theory.

3.1. Mediating Theory

Lev Vygotsky, one of the important pioneers in the Theory of Social Interaction, advocates mediation in his Theory of Psychological Development. To him, mediators refer to the important people to help children or students improve their skills and knowledge during the process of their cognitive development. Among the interactions between teachers and students, the former can guide and support the latter to reach a higher standard of cognitive activities than learning alone, which makes students achieve their ZDP (Zone of Proximal Development).

Feurstein, another advocate of the Theory of Interaction and mediation, puts forward the idea that children' learning is formed by significant adults. In his opinion, teachers are considered as mediators during the teaching process [10]. Teachers select and present some ways that they think most suitable to help and promote students' learning.

3.2. Relevance Theory

The criterion to understand discourse is the cognitive theory put forward by Sperber and Wilson in Relevance theory. When people understand discourse, they only pay attention to the information about themselves, although every speech act needs to be focused on. People can make reasonable deductions from the speakers' intention and make actual reactions to discourse because the relevance theory exists between discourse itself and context.

Following is the example. Here is a conversation between a teacher and a student.

Teacher: Whether do you complete your English homework or not?

Student: I even didn't complete my Chinese and Maths homework.

The teacher can know that the student didn't complete both Chinese and Maths homework and the student didn't have enough time to complete homework. What's more, the teacher can deduce that Chinese and Maths are more important than English in the opinion of the student and he or she didn't complete English homework from the teacher' individual effort.

And relevance actually relies on two main aspects: contextual effect and individual effort. Contextual effect is necessary to measure the relevance theory. In the same situation, the bigger the contextual effect is, the stronger the relevance theory is. The contextual effect is, however, not the only condition to measure the relevance theory, and individual effort is also required. Contextual effect can be achieved through individual effort. The greater the effort is needed to gain contextual effect, the lower the relevance is.

3.3. Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory was put forward by Austin. The

theory is about the speech event assumption. In 1962, Austin published a book called *How to Do Things with Words* about sentence analysis. There are many studies about sentence analysis. For example, sentences are classified into several categories such as statements, questions, exclamations. However, when he investigated people's actual speech and activities, he found out people spoke just for realizing some intention or some purpose. In other words, when people speak, they are performing acts. He called such act speech act theory because the act is accomplished by languages.

Austin holds the view that there are three senses when we say something or do something, including the act of utterance (locutionary act), the purpose of utterance (illocutionary act), and the effect of utterance (perlocutionary act). His views had caused a lot of echoes in the fields of linguistics, linguistic philosophy, and cognitive science, which played a positive part in the studies of the further usage of language knowledge.

To sum up, the purpose of one's speaking was not speaking itself, but the speaker wanted to achieve some kind of intentions or achieve a particular purpose through speaking. When teachers do the same locutionary acts, it will potentially bring about different illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts, conveying different personal relationships.

4. Research Methodology

Research methodology is mainly about the way to carry out a study. The author states five points: research purposes, research questions, research subjects, research tools, data collection and analysis.

4.1. Research Purposes

The study aims at the description of classroom instructions. And the author hopes to learn something realistic about the classroom instructional language, such as the definition, the features and the functions. To help teachers use more effective classroom instructions, the author hopes to find out the factors that contribute to ineffective classroom instructions, and to improve the teaching in English classes.

4.2. Research Questions

I classify the questions into four categories.

First, the importance of the English classroom instructions

- 1 Is classroom instructional language important to students' language learning?
 - 2 Are classroom instructions teachers use important to students' English learning?
 - 3 Is the atmosphere active in your English classes?
- Second, the students' understanding of classroom instructions
- 4 Can students understand classroom instructions teachers give?
 - 5 Why can't students understand the classroom instructions teachers give?

Third, the variety of the classroom instructional language

- 6 How many instructions do teachers use in English classes?
 - 7 How many kinds of instructions teachers use in English classes?
- Fourth, the students' preferences about classroom instructional language
- 8 How to give classroom instructions the students hope?
 - 9 Which language do students prefer to hear when English teachers organize activities?
 - 10 Which kinds of sentences do students like when teachers give the instructions?

4.3. Research Subjects

The subjects in this research are some students and some teachers in a high school in Gaoyou, Yangzhou. The students and the teachers are willing to take part in this research, and their names and other information are confidential for privacy.

20 teachers are given to complete the questionnaires, and I observe several classes of them. The 20 teachers are very experienced, so that they have their own effective methods in English teaching. Most of them are in their forties. Fifteen teachers are women and all of them teach no less than one class and the other five male teachers, are also head teachers, teach two classes.

There are one hundred students participating in this study. Most of them are 17 years old, and a small number of them are 18. 57 students are girls. The 100 students, are divided into ten groups, ten in class one, ten in class two, ten in class three, ten in class four, ten in class five, ten in class six, ten in class seven, ten in class eight, ten in class nine, ten in class eleven. The researcher also attended some classes of these teachers to observe their usage of the English instructions.

5. Conclusions

The author concluded the thesis in three aspects: major findings, suggestions and limitations. There are two major findings in this research. However, there are still some limitations here.

5.1. Major Findings

This thesis has tried to describe and study the teachers' classroom instructions. The author made two kinds of questionnaires to observe class activities, and then summarize the statistics of questionnaires. The following is the summary of the results and discussions:

- 1) The author analyzes the influence of classroom instructions on English teaching from three parts: in the beginning of classes, during the teaching process and at the end of classes.
- 2) The author also finds some methods to achieve the effective classroom instructions. a) improving teachers' own professional knowledge; b) making teacher' speed appropriately; c) promoting teachers' organizing abilities; d) encouraging the interest in English of students; e) increasing students' participation.

5.2. Suggestions

Although the kinds of instructions teachers use, today, are not too various, teachers can create new forms in the future and find some more methods to achieve the effective classroom instructions.

Although there are obstacles in future researches, there is still great hope for something new, something useful about classroom instructions in English teaching. The classroom instructional language is valuable in improving English teaching.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by the funding of the project of Teaching Research in Yancheng Normal University (No. 14YCTCJY043)

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