Managing student participation: Teacher strategies in an EFL course

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Outline

- Research context
- Theoretical framework
- Previous research
- Data
- Method
- Results
- Conclusion

Research context: The course

- Business English speaking course
  - For undergraduate students
  - To train students' spoken skills in various business contexts and their ability to learn online
  - Conducted in SL by a Swedish university

- 17 students with an average age of 24

- 1 teacher

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Research context: The course

- Recorded using the screen-capture software ScreenFlow
- The total length of the recordings: approximately 17 hours
- Generated two papers
  1. Wang, A. (2015). Facilitating participation: Teacher roles in a multi-user virtual learning environment. *Language Learning & Technology, 19*(2), 156–176. Retrieved from http://llt.msu.edu/issues/june2015/wang.pdf
  2. Wang, A. (2014). Managing student participation: Teacher strategies in a virtual English course. *The JALT CALL Journal, 10*(2), 105–125.

Research context: Second Life

- 3D virtual learning environment
  - Avatar
  - Synchronous voice chat and synchronous and asynchronous text chat

Theoretical framework: Student participation and teacher talk

- Student participation
  - Students should be engaged in learning tasks, regardless of the types of tasks, in order for the learning outcome to be achieved (Emmer & Stough, 2001).
- Teacher talk:
  - Strategies used "to establish order, engage students, or elicit their cooperation" (Emmer & Stough, 2001, p. 103).
- Gap
  - Previous research focused on criticizing excessive teacher talk time, instead of conducting a qualitative analysis of teacher talk (Walsh, 2002).

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Theoretical framework: CA

- Conversational Analysis (CA)
  - "The systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction: talk-in-interaction" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 11).
  - Applied to study teacher talk and student participation **in institutional settings**: the dynamic and changing nature of EFL classroom discourse (Walsh, 2002).

Theoretical framework: TBLT

- Task-based language teaching (TBLT):
  - "the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose" (Willis, 1996, p. 23).

- Three task phases:
  - pre-task phase: introduction of topics and tasks, language preparation (Willis,1996)
  - during-task phase: student output-oriented phase under teacher monitoring, obligatory (Willis, 1996)
  - post-task phase: teacher feedback on students' performance and correction of students' language deficiencies (Willis, 1996; Walsh, 2002)

Previous research: Teacher strategies

- Latching turns
  - Often marked by "=" in transcripts
  - "No interval between the end of a prior and start of a next piece of talk" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, p. 731).
  - English teachers should provide a model of "the language needed at the end of a previous turn" (Walsh, 2002, p. 13)
- Turn initiation
  - Face-to-face classroom and in SL: student turns usually initiated by teachers (Mori & Zuengler, 2008; Deutschmann & Panichi, 2009)

Previous research: Teacher strategies

- Control topics
  - Initiating and changing topics in institutional conversations (Chun, 1994)
  - In online context: keep students on task and to encourage student participation (Zou, 2013)
- The imperative mood
  - The teachers' frequent use of the imperative mood: signify teacher power over students (Abdullah & Hosseini, 2012)
  - In online English learning: teachers use the imperative mood more often than students (Sotillo, 2000)

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Previous research: Teacher strategies

- Using questions
  - In the face-to-face classroom: prominently used to initiate student turns (Mori and Zuengler 2008)
  - Two types of questions (Luu & Nguyen, 2010, pp. 33)
    - Display questions: "for which the teacher knows the answers beforehand and requires students to display knowledge" (p. 33)
    - Referential questions: to seek information that teachers do not know
      - ➢ Open referential
      - ➢ Closed referential (y/n)

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Previous research: Teacher strategies

- Taking a back seat
  - Students managing their own conversations (Walsh, 2002)
  - Communication breakdown, necessary scaffolding (Walsh, 2002).
- Creating a social communicative environment
  - Conducive to EFL in virtual environments (Peterson, 2012)
  - No specific studies of teachers' use of social formulas within MUVEs
- Providing feedback
  - Face-to-face classroom: teacher correcting student-produced turns prominent (Mori & Zuengler, 2008)
  - Direct and minimal error corrections with brief language (Walsh, 2002)

Data

- 85 minutes and five seconds of the recordings were transcribed
  - transcription conventions from Hutchby & Wooffitt, (2008) (see Appendix A)
  - Students: fake family names according to their nationalities
- Teacher talk: the teacher's verbal language output in the course
- An online student questionnaire

Method

- Qualitative analysis of teacher talk
  - Latching turns
  - Turn initiation
  - Topic control and topic shift
  - The imperative mood
  - Using questions
  - Taking a back seat
  - Social formulas
  - Feedback

Results: Latching turns

- Occurred often: Due to the lack of body language to signal the end of a turn
- Very brief in most cases
- Longer linguistic output in the pre-task phase
- Minimal responses in the during-task phase

(1) (from the pre-task phase)

Zhao: = ( ) **I can't follow you. because I don't know what's you are talking about=**

Teacher: =**no, that's fine we're talking about a region of Sweden called Skåne.**

(3.0)

Zhao: Skåne?

Teacher: yes, it stan- it stands in the very south. yes. ((laughing))

(2) (from the during-task phase)

Svensson: =**it sounds very expensive**=

Teacher: =**erm**=

Virtanen: =**yeah they're like stupid animals**

Teacher: [erm]

Peterson: **[it's] much cheaper to just kill them** =

Teacher: =**erm**=

Results: Turn initiation

- During-task phase
  - Students' turns: self-initiated
  - "[T]he teacher had an open mind and listened to all views presented" (an average rate of 5.5)
- Pre-task and post-task phases: four fifths, teacher-initiated student turns
  - Pre-task: the teacher nominated inactive students to take turns
  - Post-task: checked students' understanding of his individual feedback

Results: Topic control and topic shift

- All the topics throughout the course: initiated and closed by the teacher

(3) (from the during-task phase)

Teacher: <**we:ll ladies? erm this is a meeting that's been called by Ms Bikilla as a council officer to: hear what local people have to say and to try work out umm what umm what the town is gonna do about the problem of pigeons.** so over to you, Ms Bikilla, you get to start you get to introduce the situation and invite people to speak.>

[…]

Teacher: […], **rightladies, I tell you you can take your role-playing hats off now but stay where you are ok?**

Results: Topic control and topic shift

- The teacher changed the topic under discussion
  - Motivating inactive students to participate

(4) (from the during-task phase)

Teacher: excuse me I am from the local newspaper, and I have a question fo:r erm Ms Nilsson, the animal lover here. umm, I understand that you don't think it's a good idea to kill the pigeons at all. ha- have I understood you right?

Nilsson: yes, it's too barbaric.

Teacher: what would you do instead then […]

(4.0)

Nilsson: well I think it would be possible like to train them?

(3.0)

Teacher: yes ? (1.0) really ? (2.0) train them to do what?

Nilsson: I don't know [it's like]

((eight turns omitted))

T: =erm if I- [if I- erm]

Nilsson: [can't kill] everything you hate.

Teacher: **hmm if- if I can just ask the question I mean just ask this question. hmm is money the only the only consideration in life? or should we also think things like humanity a:nd respect fo:r other living creatures?**

Results: Overlapping turns

- Overleaping turns: common (cf. Smith, 2003; Baker et al., 2009)

- Reflected on by one student in the questionnaire:
  - "It was hard to know if some [sic] else were [sic] going to talk, sometimes several persons talked at the same time and with the result you couldn't hear anything."

Results: The imperative mood

- Directed imperatives more often than general imperatives
  - Pre-task phase: directed imperatives about three times as often as general imperatives
  - During-task and post-task phases: much less and almost equally often
- Impacts
  - Allocating equal participation opportunities

(6) (from the pre-task phase)

Teacher: […] what about you M:s Ms Liu. (2.0) anything nice happened to you? (4.0) ok, Ms Liu is not with us either=

Liu: =**yeah ((with noises and echoes))**=

Teacher: =**yeah yeah go on.** (2.0) **go on**=

Liu: =**I** just forgot to open my microphone yeah erm

- Providing technical scaffolding (Example 5)

Results: Using questions

- Used referential questions: both open and closed referential questions more often than display questions

- Impacts of referential questions

  - Encourage inactive students to participate

    (4) Nilsson: **well I think it would be possible like to train them?**

    (3.0)

    Teacher: **yes ? (1.0) really ? (2.0) train them to do what?**

  - Closed referential questions: checking students' understanding of the task

    (9) (from the pre-task phase)

    Teacher: <so then guys, here are my stories. […] you can discuss amongst yourselves which one of those stories you think is a lie. **all right? everything's clear?** >

    Eriksson: clear

  - Make the recipients of questions explicit

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- Impacts of infrequent use of display questions
  - a way of allocating equal participation opportunities

  (10) (from the pre-task phase)

  Teacher: […] women you know they- they- they should be educated but we should stop educating them when they're about 16. **don't you agree Ms Zhao?**

  Zhao: erm yeah I- I- agree with you […]

  - to provide technical assistance (Example 11)

- Directed questions more often than general questions

Results: Taking a back seat and intervening

- Took a back seat in the during-task phase, intervening only when needed

(12) (from the during-task phase)

Svensson: ok but but I would like to get some numbers here […]

((seven turns omitted))

Svensson: I'm just concerned about the costs […] what about the taxes will you raise the taxes for our residents? or, could you? I mean I need numbers.

Teacher: **that's probably a question for Ms Bikilla as the council [officer]**

Results: using social formulas

- Social formulas
  - Used often, i.e. greetings, leave takings, farewells, and polite address (contrasting with Benwell and Stokoe, 2006)

  (13) (from the pre-task phase)

  Teacher: **let's see how everyone's sound is. […] Ms Sklenár, how how are you today?**

  - An added purpose: to test student technology (Example13)

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Results: Feedback

- The pre-task and during-task: seldom corrected student language errors

- Post-task phase: providing teacher feedback

(14) (from the post-task phase)
Teacher: […] **there's two linguistic points you need to work on. one of them i:s there were hell of a lot of likes in what you said.** […] o:ne one way out of it is to- is to practice giving yourself perhaps one or two more ( ) similar phrases that do the job. […] **the other is is just one sound. Erm you need to start saying /ʃ/ not /s/.** […] it's- it's clearly a Finish problem

Conclusions

➢ Task phases influence teacher strategies.

➢ The specific nature of SL makes some teacher strategies important.

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Thanks!

Questions are welcome!

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Other studies

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