



Colapso

#### El americano herido

"La confusión que siente el americano medio hoy es más profunda. Más allá de la sorpresa que experimenta al descubrir el nivel de su ignorancia ante los problemas del mundo, siente como que los cimientos de su mundo se han venido abajo. El americano es una persona que cree en grandes verdades, 'verdades evidentes', como dice la declaración de independencia, y una de ellas es que Estados Unidos, el país al que en casi todos los casos huyeron sus antepasados en busca de una vida más segura y mejor, es una fortaleza contra los males que podrían existir en el mundo externo, desconocido. Fortress America, 'fortaleza América', es la expresión que utilizan hace mucho tiempo. Pero de repente si aquellos dos magníficos símbolos del poder económico y militar de los Estados Unidos ("la hiperpotencia", como dicen los franceses), como lo son el World Trade Center y el Pentágono, son vulnerables, entonces todos somos vulnerables".

John Carlin, escritor

# Educación

**Oral behaviors in foreign language classes  
A preliminary report**

**Resumen**

Este artículo resume los avances de la primera etapa del proyecto UNAB-COLCIENCIAS "Funciones de las conductas orales de los profesores de lenguas en el desarrollo de clases de inglés como lengua extranjera". El objetivo principal de este proyecto es mejorar el entendimiento de los roles del habla del profesor en el desarrollo de sus clases. Esta investigación de la clase, parte de la afirmación hecha por investigadores de lenguas y lingüistas de que el profesor de lenguas habla más del 87% del tiempo de la clase. Se intenta responder a la pregunta de cuáles son las funciones del habla del profesor en el desarrollo de sus clases de inglés. El propósito fundamental de este proyecto es determinar qué conductas orales mejor, o más frecuentemente conducen a un proceso de enseñanza. A corto plazo se espera describir las conductas orales de los profesores de lenguas para dar información, enseñar gramática y corregir los errores en las clases de inglés.

**Palabras claves:** classroom research, naturalistic inquiry, class observation, TEFL, teacher talk, oral error treatment, implicit and explicit grammar, grammar input, interaction, second language acquisition

**Abstract**

This article summarizes the advance of the descriptive stage of the UNAB-COLCIENCIAS project: "Functions of language instructors' oral behaviors in the development of English as a foreign language classes". The main goal of this project is to improve the understanding of the roles of teacher talk in the development of EFL classes. This classroom research originates from the statement made by language researchers and linguists that language instructors talk for more than 87% of class time. We attempt to answer the question about functions of teacher talk in the development of English classes. Our main purpose is to determine which instructors' behaviors best, or more frequently, lead to effective language teaching. On the short term, we pursue to describe language instructors' oral behaviors in conveying information, grammar, and error treatment.

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**Oral behaviors in foreign language classes:  
A preliminary report**

**Gloria Balcárcel Zambrano**

**Problem background**

The success or failure of many EFL/ESL programs depends mainly on the student's development of communicative skills. Many Colombian EFL classrooms at higher level lack the appropriate development of speaking skills. In fact, students are not practicing them adequately since it is the teacher who dominates the classroom talk as a consequence, students seem not to have enough opportunities to speak and practice the foreign language in class. The students only speak when they are called upon. Most of them are low-input generators, or learners who participate minimally and are generally passive in classroom interaction.

This research is about what actually happens - not just what happens to the plans we make, but what happens anyway, independently of our designs (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). This focus on the classroom is important because teachers and researchers alike want to know which classroom events, planned or not, make our learners' task easier or more difficult. We also know that 'the best laid plans' do not guarantee perfect results. And we all know that lessons we have not properly planned are sometimes spectacularly successful. It is worth focusing on the classroom, then, on the doing rather than the planning, just because it is surely whatever actually happens in the classroom that really matters, that makes a difference to our learners' progress.

As a consequence, the major claim that underlies the whole research: in order to help our learners learn, it is not 'the latest method' that we need, but rather a fuller understanding of the language classroom and what goes

on there. So, in the first and main study we will see what functions classroom talk fulfills in the language teaching-learning process to see if there is evidence that these issues matter or that they make much of a difference in language learning. Previous observations of EFL classes at the UNAB during the initial stages of this study have showed some evidence that teachers spend a considerable amount of time in error treatment and grammar input. Consequently, in order to have a deeper understanding, the second study will look at oral errors and how teachers deal with them -one of the prominent topics in early classroom-centered research. The third and last study will focus on one of the complexities of classroom input, the grammar input.

As many language researchers we have begun to study what goes on in the classroom. We want to find very much more happening than just a certain number of instructors teaching for a certain period of time or the more or less adequate implementation of some particular method. Looking in classrooms we see so much going on that it becomes easy to understand why the choice of a global teaching method cannot be what really makes some classrooms better places for learners to be in than others. Although there is a lot that can be studied without anyone worrying about whether or not a particular teaching point has been successfully taught (that is, learned), in the long run we must all be interested in effective learning. Thus, we want to know whether or not the particular issues we study (functions of teacher talk, oral error treatment patterns or grammar input) are important in relation to effective learning.

### Purpose of the Study

The present research aims at the description of the different teacher's oral behaviors, which take place in the EFL classroom, as well as at the analysis of the impact of teacher talk on the learning process of EFL in a private Colombian university. In a second stage, this study pretends to determine how to control teacher's oral behaviors in order to optimize teacher talk and encourage student participation.

The role of instructors is analyzed by gathering data using The Foreign Language of Interaction Analysis -the FLint system instrument (Moskowitz, 1971), the corrective feedback categories developed by Lyster & Ranta (1997), and by interviewing teachers to provide data and context. This analysis evolves from rich, thick narrative using tools of qualitative inquiry that will result in the culmination of an experimental study.

### Research Questions

Since teachers do so much talking in the classroom, and students do not seem to have enough opportunities to speak, the investigators attempt to answer the following research questions for this study:

1. What is teacher talk like in EFL classrooms?
2. What regularities can be observed concerning teacher talk?
3. What are the roles of teacher talk in the development of EFL classes?

### Significance of the Study

The results of this study will benefit teachers, school and university administrators, teacher trainers, and second language researchers to find useful implications for language teaching, language curriculum development, and further research. We expect to help not only people from the Language Department of the Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga but also from other universities, high schools, elementary schools, and language centers of Bucaramanga as well as of other Colombian cities that offer foreign language courses and programs.

Through this qualitative investigation, the researcher will illuminate instructors' issues such as instructors' previously experiences in day to day activities as speakers in

their classes. By increasing understanding of teacher talk and its roles in EFL classrooms, researchers will be able to offer insight to other institutions contemplating a similar problem.

There are very important differences between foreign language and second language contexts with regard to the availability of authentic target language input and opportunities to communicate (Allwright, 1991). The classroom research review has not, however, revealed particular classroom processes that appear dependent on the contextual contrast. For example, translation policy, clarifying explanations, some managerial directives, some social contact, and praise. This research could provide outcomes for further research in Colombia and in other contexts where EFL/ESL is taught.

### Methodology

Since we wanted to provide a picture of each of three already mentioned aspects as they naturally occurred, we used the observational procedures from naturalistic inquiry. Then, we tried not to influence the normally occurring patterns of instruction and interaction, but describe and understand these processes. Thus, we first used the observation and topical interview to document the process variables that we involved in implementing the treatment in product-oriented experimental research in the second stage.

Since this is a descriptive research in its first stage, we designed the approach of this research as follows:

First, we reviewed the literature about language research. Then we decided the area of research and we defined the objectives in clear and specific terms. After that, we decided facts and characteristics we wanted to be uncovered. Second, we collected the data. We observed and recorded the classes using FLint observation instrument designed by Motzkowitz (1971) and categories for corrective feedback developed by Lyster & Ranta (1997).

Fifteen non-native foreign language instructors with the entire classes were selected at random among the available classes at Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga.

We want to test the data collected with experts that have conducted similar studies. Once we have the data revised, we will proceed to report results.

Third, we will analyze the data in order to find the behaviors that are most frequent in the teaching process and provide a picture of what it is occurring in our English classes.

### Literature Review

We believe that the function of an educational system is to create the conditions whereby learners might generate their own skills and knowledge. Thus, the main purpose of education is to facilitate the process whereby learners make their own meaning.

One of the major sources of theoretical issues in L2 classroom learning concerns the nature of instruction that results from different contexts. We can say that second language instruction occurs in two contexts: the foreign language context and the second language context. In the "foreign language" context, relevant to perhaps the majority of L2 learners, the learner acquires the language in the surrounding society (such as English in Colombia, French in the United States, German in Spain). As a consequence, the L2 is usually treated as equivalent to any school subject, like statistics, and history, in which terminology, concepts, and rules are taught, homework is written, and tests are taken. Associated with the subject are of course a wide range of attitudes toward the L2 people and culture that affects the learning process.

Brown (1994) offers the definition of language we consider for this research. He consolidated a definition of language in the following statements:

- Language is systematic and generative.
- Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.
- Those symbols are primarily vocal, but may also be visual.
- The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.
- Language is used for communication.
- Language operates in a speech community or culture.
- Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.
- All people acquire language in much the same way. Language and language learning both have universal characteristics.

This research deals primarily with the "process" variables within the "classroom". The classroom, in this particular research has been defined as "the gathering for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning" (Van Lier, 1988). Gaies (1980) says that the classroom setting is the place where instructors and students come together and language learning happens.

Teaching cannot be defined apart from learning. Teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn, setting the conditions for learning. Our understanding of how the learner learns has determined our philosophy of education, our teaching styles, our approach, methods, and classroom techniques. Moreover, a theory of teaching in harmony with an integrated understanding of the learner and of the subject matter to be learned (English) can point the way to successful procedures under the various constraints of the university context of teaching.

According to Krashen (1977, 1982, and 1985), language acquisition takes place through comprehension. He hypothesized that when students understand a message in the language containing a structure that is one step in advance of that learner's current level of competence, then that structure will be acquired. Many teachers found it consistent with the observable fact that there is often little tangible evidence of any direct relationship between teaching and learning. It is also reassuring for those teachers who were demoralized by the fact that their learners did not learn what they had taught.

Corder (1978) pointed out that while second language learners, particularly those living in the target culture, may be exposed to a great deal of language, not all of it can be utilized by their developing internal grammatical systems. Only a portion of the input can serve as 'intake'.

We have considered the relationships among negotiated interaction, comprehensible input, and language acquisition. Teachers need to be able to manage their interaction with the class in a way that allows all the students equal opportunities to participate. Thus teachers establish their own rules for appropriate classroom behavior. 'Comprehensible input' is a term popularized by Krashen. It refers to the fact that not all the target language to which foreign language learners are exposed is understandable: only some of the language they hear makes sense to them.

Input to the learners is the result of unplanned factors as well as the planned implementation of the syllabus. Research theory and practical experience all point to the fact that input is crucial to language learning. 'Input' refers to the language which the learners hear (or read) - that is, the language samples to which they are exposed.

Long (1983) has proposed the following model to account for the relationships between negotiated interactions, comprehensible input, and language acquisition.

This model is different from Krashen's idea that comprehensible input is responsible for progress in language

acquisition. When performers speak, they encourage input (people speak to them). In contrast, Long's model emphasizes the primacy of conversation (interaction) and its role in getting comprehensible input.

Long (1980, 1981, 1983) supplemented the strict view that comprehensible input leads to acquisition with the additional notion that native speaker's speech (NS) to nonnative (NNS) is most effective for acquisition when it contains "modified interaction". These interactive features consist of ways of negotiating comprehensibility and meaning. Long suggests, in fact, that interactive modifications are more important for acquisition than modification of NS speech that only result in simplified target language (TL) syntax and morphology.

Research both in first language classrooms and in L2 classrooms has established that teachers typically do between one half and three quarters of the talking done in class. Teacher talk in the Colombian EFL classrooms tends to support this assumption. Teacher Talk is one of the major ways that teachers convey information to learners, and it is also one of the primary means of controlling learner behavior. Some language studies underline other functions Teacher Talk serves, including focusing attention, encouraging student participation and moving the lesson forward.

Research in first language classrooms has established that teachers tend to do most of the talking (about 60% of the moves), mostly as soliciting and reacting moves (Bellack et al. 1966). Legarreta (1977) investigated five bilingual education kindergarten classrooms representing two program types, using time intervals in an adaptation of Flanders observational system to code segments of teacher talk and student talk. She found that the teachers and teacher aides together accounted for 70% to 89% of the total talk. On the other hand, Enright (1984) found the teachers and aides speaking considerably less in two bilingual kindergarten classes similar in context to those observed by Legarreta.

The studies concerning teacher talk have explored not only the amount and types of teacher talk but also the functional distribution of teacher talk. Gaies (1977) tape-recorded a group of teachers-in-training talking in two different situations: 1) with their peers, and 2) with their own students in practice teaching assignments. Long and Sato (1983) analyzed transcripts of six elementary adult ESL classes with an average of twenty students per class. Milk (1982) adapted Sinclair and Coulthard's scheme in order to analyze the functions of teacher utterances. He found out

that the dominant types were "elicitation" (23%), "informatives" (22%), "reply" (19%) and "follow-up" (about 14%). Later, J. D. Ramirez et al. (1986) analyzed the pedagogical functions of explaining, commanding, questioning, modeling, feedback, and others.

Besides modifications of speech rate, prosody and phonology in L2 classrooms, there are likewise modifications of vocabulary and syntax. Teachers, as well as non-teachers, try to use more basic or less varied vocabulary with non-natives. They reduce the amount of idioms and colloquial vocabulary, and use more concrete and proper nouns.

Teachers' syntactic modifications are also very important characteristics of teacher talk studies. Chaudron (1993) states that they can be grouped into five types: measures of length of utterances, measures of subordination, measures of markedness, measures of grammaticality, and measures of distribution of sentence types.

Some studies suggest that the length of utterance as well as the complexity of teachers' speech are adjusted downward for L2 or less proficient learners. Gaies (1977) performed the first statistical test on length of T-units in L2 instructional settings. There was a significant overall trend toward longer teacher T-units (in words) for beginning- to advanced-level learners according to his test. Henzl's studies (1973, 1979) revealed little use of subordinate clauses when speaking to nonnative speakers. He also reports the use of a higher proportion of verbs in the simple present tense, less inflectional complexity, less diversity in case roles, and lack of passive constructions. Teacher talk is adapted to L2 learners by using less marked structures and sentence fragments. These sentence fragments are used as elicitation devices, repetitions, etc.

### Conclusions

This study demonstrates how oral teaching strategies we use in the classroom affect the participation process of our students. Pedagogical implications include effective strategies that can be applied to our own work context to adjust teacher talk to promote language interaction. The research team is collecting and categorizing the information to analyze it and report results and conclusions of the descriptive stage in the next article. We are also setting workshops for primary, secondary, and university teachers to disseminate our findings in Bucaramanga and in the next Asocopi Conference in Pereira.

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