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Language Awareness in the Conversation Class

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Abstract

This paper examines how Classroom Discourse influences the conversational speaking style of the language student. It emphasizes the importance of teachers being aware of the components of conversation, that the teacher raise the second language (L2) learner's awareness of these elements and that the teacher needs to modify the classroom situation to limit the effect of classroom discourse on the learner's language development. A case study is also made of a Role Play activity performed in a conversation class situation to show how the teaching situation, the teacher – student power relationship and classroom discourse influence the L2 learner.

Key words

sociolinguistics, discourse, conversation, turn-taking

Introduction

Research into the development of communicative competence in second language has focused on the classroom procedures to determine the influence of L2 development. Some of this research has shown that non-native performance may be as a result of teaching. Beebe and Takahashi (1989) suggest that misconceptions among Japanese students about the ëdirectnessí of English compared to Japanese were induced by the teacher. Lorcher (1986) notes that turn-taking, topic nomination, and closing of conversations in a typical classroom are controlled by the teacher giving students no real opportunity to develop these aspects of conversational management. Kasper (1989) draws attention to the use of first language (L1) for phatic sequences such as openings and closings. The typical classroom setup and conditions may also inhibit second language development. Edmondson et.al. (1984) suggest that much of what students say in class has little communicative function but is directed toward providing "correct" answers. Ellis (1992) reports in a two-year longitudinal study of classroom requests that the classroom environment may be insufficient for the development of the full range of request types and strategies. Ellis attributes this to the limited

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communicative needs of his subjects.

Curriculum content and models of English dialogs and Role Plays found in texts are limiting and inaccurate. Scotton and Bernstein (1988) in a study on direction-giving in natural conversations, examine conversation closings and conclude that the dialogs in texts claiming to teach communicative English, poorly illustrate typical closings in English. The conclusion that can be drawn is that students, especially those in EFL environment, have poor models to learn from.

Research seems to indicate that classroom procedure and teaching can have a negative influence on the development of second language communicative competence. It is important to give our learners the best possible study environment and materials but on the other hand it is impossible to expose learners to all that they will experience when using the language they are studying. Learners do bring with them a L1 knowledge of how language is used. This existing knowledge should be called upon to make them aware that they need to use language beyond just the language level and need to know how they are using it. To be fully competent they need to be aware of similarities and differences in the usage of language between their L1 and L2 and how to apply them.

Language Awareness is an approach to language instruction that calls for enfranchising the learner. To be able to use a language the learner needs not only to know how to formulate it grammatically but also how to use it according to appropriate rules and conventions of usage in addition to knowing how society uses that language. To achieve this, learners and teachers need to become "discourse analysts" (McCarthy & Carter, 1994) and "contrastive analysts" (James & Garrett, 1992). Noting the behavioral characteristics of discourse within a language will reveal insights into the culture. McCarthy and Carter (1994) note for example, the cultural significance of silence in Japanese. James and Garrett (1992) suggest that there is some educational value for learners to be made aware of their implicit mother tongue intuitions and to contrast this with explicit knowledge of the L2 they are learning. Toward this purpose, Tinkel (1992) and Silvester (1992) have in instruction groups, where learners have a common mother tongue, focused on turning learners' implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Carter views contrast and comparison as the best means of raising awareness in students of the formalistic aspects of their models (James & Garrett, 1992). Learners need to have an awareness of the relationship between language and power. The implicit use of power in discourse types (e.g. teacher-student) needs to be understood and its necessary to decide whether they need to conform or not (Fairclough, 1994). In summary, Language Awareness means helping learners to make conscious decisions about their usage of language (their mother tongue and the language they are learning), and giving them an awareness of the social functions and manipulations embedded in language (implicit power in discourse, the relationship between language and ideology and culture). It is based on the premise that this perception of language will

improve their performance.

This paper first compares conversation and classroom interaction discourse types and then through a case study of a role play performed as part of a lesson in a language school classroom, shows how the students' performance can be influenced by the classroom interactive style. Finally, a description is given of how the Role Play can be a source for generation of language awareness discussions or observations and how studentsí performance in the role play can be improved through having a greater language awareness.

Defining Conversation

Most language courses or textbooks use the word conversation in their titles. Many students will say that they want to study "conversation". But what exactly is conversation? Since we are teaching "conversation", it is necessary to define what it is exactly that we are teaching. Although "conversation" is a term used very broadly to refer to speaking, it is in the field of Discourse considered to be a type of discourse.

Conversation can be defined in terms of the conversation model of Goffman (1976). According to this model of communication, the constraints of conversation are as follows:

1) There must be two-way exchange of a message (the participant number should be at least two).
2) Some form of back-channeling should take place (verbal or nonverbal to inform the speaker of reception).
3) Turns (indications of speaker selection, end of the message).
4) Pre-empt signals (to interrupt, to maintain the floor, to repair).
5) Framing capabilities (cues and hearer signals for side-sequences).
6) Grice's maxims of cooperation for maintaining a conversation (relevance, informative, truthful, clarity).
7) Non-participant constraints.

(Hatch and Long, 1980)

This model though could refer to any oral interaction. The model is an illustration of the work done in conversational analysis. Much work in this area has been done based on the description of this system of constraints of conversation (Hatch and Long, 1980). As a description of conversation, this model is a listing of the elements that constitute conversation but within each culture, conversation is a complex combination of each of these components used to varying degrees. For example, silence and pauses are a basic component of conversation. But within each culture, the "acceptable" length of silence varies.

Cook gives a very loose description of conversation as that form of talk that has no

primary task, power roles of the participants are temporarily suspended, the number of participants is at least two, the turn-taking is short and there is no audience other than the participants (Cook, 1980). This is a very basic description which needs some comment. Generally, it may seem - and Cook's definition would seem to apply in this case - that the function of conversation is none other than maintaining or establishing relationships. Perhaps he has in mind casual conversation. But on the other hand, one could engage in conversation with the intent of giving an invitation or requesting assistance, that is a conversation in which a task is to be performed. These are tasks which have codes defining their manner of deliverance. Failing to observe and employ these codes will make the listener suspicious or could be offensive to the listener. Also one is obligated to perform the speech act task initiated in a conversation. Goffman refers to these as the system of ritual constraints (Hatch & Long, 1980). For example, when speaking in English, if one has nothing left to say in the conversation, that person cannot abruptly walk away. If the conversation has concluded, the participants are obliged to close the conversation and need to follow the prescribed behavior for doing so. Conversation may imply equal participant status and the temporary suspension of power roles (manager/subordinate; teacher/student etc.) but they are still respected or quickly reverted to. It is quite possible that the participants will flow in and out of their power status a number of times in a single encounter. For example, a manager and a subordinate could be "chatting" at lunch break. The conversation may start on the topic of the weekend football game, switch to something about work and then move on to current news. In this single encounter, the power roles of the relationship will be activated and suspended from topic to topic. This example also illustrates that the topic in conversation is undefined and unpredictable. In conversation one can talk about anything and change the topic at will. Conversation, even in its most simplest form is conducted within socially defined practices.

Turn-taking as a basic element of conversation has been well researched in English. Taking turns is how the speaker retains or passes the floor. The way in which it is managed differs from language to language. Learners of a second language need to be explicitly informed about it and need to learn how it is managed in their target language (TL). For example, the time lapse between turns in English is minimal with latching occurring between turns (Sacks, Schegoff, and Jefferson, 1974). This for the language learner may be similar or different from his or her L1. Conversational analysis has identified various types of turn-taking use to manage conversation. The most common is adjacency pairs - paired utterances that usually require a particular response (invitation – acceptance, the preferred response or refusal the unpreferred response). Levinson (1983) discusses others: insertion sequences, where a question-answer routine is embedded within another. Side sequences where a speaker refers to an unrelated topic and then returns to the original topic operating across the current and next turn in the conversation. These types of turn-taking emphasize

the unpredictability of conversation and its particular characteristic of 'negotiation of time' (Cook, 1989). Another defining type of turn-taking particular to conversation is repair. This is when the speaker clarifies or corrects his or her utterance or that of another. Utterances which draw attention to the upcoming turn are called pre-sequences. In English the pre-closings in a conversation are a good example of pre-sequencing (the conversation closing event in English usually takes a number of turns before the final "goodbye" is said). Repair and pre-sequencing usually occur over three or four turns (Levinson, 1983). Turn signals are not limited to linguistic means only, intonation (the use of pitch), body language (nonverbal gestures facilitate topic maintenance, topic invitation and turn-taking) are also frequently used (Coulthard, 1977). Turn-taking is very complex and as a basic element of conversation. It is very necessary that the L2 learner be aware of this aspect of conversation and also of whatever similarities or differences there are between his or her L1 and L2. Problems arise for L2 learners when they try to employ their L1 turn-taking strategies when speaking in their L2. Their behavior may interpreted as too timid or too overbearing.

It can be seen that although conversation is difficult to define clearly and is a broad term, it also has very definite traits that allow speakers to intuitively recognize it as a particular type of discourse. Within each language, each of these elements of conversation are present except that from language to language they are culturally variable. Japanese students learning English are not unfamiliar with the elements of conversation but do not have explicit knowledge of them in Japanese. An awareness of the elements of conversation and how they behave in conversation in Japanese, is a good starting point for students to learn about how conversation is conducted in English.

Conversation and Classroom Discourse

Focusing on the elements of conversation and how to employ them have some advantages for the learner. First it makes the student aware that there is more to speaking than just giving out information in correct sentences. It might encourage students to offer more when speaking. It is quite often that learners stick only to the bare facts and basic information (I went shopping) and seldom offer any content (It was a nice day and I was free so I went shopping). This brevity makes them sound very unnatural. Students may feel less intimidated or insecure in knowing that their first language speaking style may be influencing their L2 attempts. Take for example, turn-taking and silence in Japanese conversation. The manner in which these two elements of conversation are employed in Japanese is very different from that of English. English native speakers challenge for and take the speaking turn far more aggressively than is done in Japanese. The length of silence in English is short and interpreted as the passing of the turn or a chance for another speaker to take the turn. Japanese students of English may feel intimidated in such situations and

could feel that they are inadequate speakers. Having some knowledge of turn-taking and the employment of silence, may make these L2 learner realize that they need to behave in a different manner and need not feel inadequate. Knowledge of conversation elements and their employment can be for the advanced learner a learning goal. By focusing on these elements of conversation, L2 learners can, when watching movies or when they are part of a group native speakers of English, observe how the L1 speakers manage the elements of conversation and learn from their observations. Class time needs to be given to raising the L2 learner's awareness of the elements of conversation. Teachers should design activities which contrast the conversation codes of the learner's L1 and the TL. The students should be tasked to make observations of native speakers and to observe how it is that they are speaking. Admittedly, this instruction is limited to intermediate and advanced students. A word of caution needs to be given here. Students' awareness of the elements of conversation has to be raised so that they can make observations and learn for themselves. Teachers need to be wary of trying to formulate rules of interaction.

Barnes' (1969) analysis of classroom discourse determined that what students say is constrained by the questions they are asked. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) found that teachers and students interacted in rigid structures and the teachers unconsciously through their interactions provided students with cues of how to respond appropriately. Allwright (1980) did an analysis into turn-taking in the ESL classroom and the means by which a turn is obtained by a student. The options usually available for turns in conversation are to accept a turn given, steal a turn, take an unsolicited turn, make a turn with the intent of just indicating attendance or to gain the floor. However, the study shows that the teacher dominated in turns to maintain the discourse, that stealing turns and making turns seldom occurred. The classroom is a good example of unequal power discourse. In the class the teacher selects and controls the topic. If this is the norm in an ESL class, students do not get a chance to develop their L2 turn-taking characteristics and become used to abdicating this to another and as a result are inclined to behave passively in conversation, waiting until they are pointedly given a turn.

One aspect of language awareness is being aware of the implicit power in routine language practices like classroom discourse which strongly reflects the power of the teacher and accredits the teacher with expert status (Fairclough, 1994). In the conversation class this is an obstruction to language development. As a teacher, I have observed that teachers teach how they were taught in their school days. They bring with them the teaching style to which they are used to from their high school years. Students also bring to the language class their past experiences of school and their concept of an educational institution, of education, of the power of the teacher and of their status as a student in the class. Both conform too readily to the roles of teacher and student in the traditional classroom. In this framework, playing the conventional role of a student, inhibits the students' willingness to speak in the language

classroom and the teacher, in the traditional teacher's role, conducts a very teacher-centered class, controlling and coordinating the tasks and activities. Neither of these behaviors are conducive to learning a language. The language teaching classroom should be more like a practical workshop where the students are guided in their task but need to take control of the task and work through it while the teacher takes the role of facilitator. In this situation students will get more opportunity to interact with each other in their TL.

Language Awareness in Teaching Practice

In the classroom, teachers need to discourage students from submitting to the power of the "teacher". It happens quite often that giving only the briefest and quickest answer to a question is how students feel they should respond to questions in class. In addition, for some students it is the quickest way for them to escape the spotlight of the teacher's attention. It is important that students be made aware that speaking English is not simply a matter of asking or answering a question. Volunteering additional information when making conversation is a form of solidarity building and makes a person seem friendly. L2 learners need to know that their brief and succinct manner of dialog could be misconstrued and misinterpreted as an unwillingness to engage in conversation. In addition, this manner makes any conversation with them a little more than a one-sided interview or even an interrogation. L2 learners need to transfer their concept of conversational discourse from their L1 as an initial step to engaging in conversation. By comparing their current "answer-only" discourse style with how they talk and behave in their L1, they will at the very least realize that something is lacking. While some teachers might want to argue that it is the language level of the student that inhibits them, this is not necessarily the case. Even a beginner L2 learner can at that level of ability can go beyond the common "yes" or "no" answer usually given and will do so when made to realize a more comprehensive answer will be more natural conversational behavior. Succinct answers are more a habit born of classroom behavior than a lack of ability. L2 learners need to learn to talk on a topic freely, to let the topic change and meander. This is done by sharing similar experiences or giving similar information without waiting for a question. The discourse style of L2 learners at low levels will be short for the simple reason that their language is limited. But it is not uncommon to find students you have being studying for a few years to still be giving short and limited answers. It might be assumed that the L2 learners are modeling their speaking style on classroom discourse which very often only requires a given answer.

Teachers need to find a way to present this problem to their students and give them instruction on how to advance their speaking style in their L2. The simplest method, which will allow a teacher to avoid unnecessary and lengthy explanation is to write out a flow chart of action denoting the role of two speakers. Take for example the simplest adjacency pair:

question – answer, which as discussed above, tends to be the most common discourse style of learners. This can be illustrated on the board for the students in the following way; a question (?) leads to an answer (A) which is what the students successfully can do and understand but which is sociolingualistically lacking. The teacher needs to add to the flow chart the need for additional information and content to flesh out the answer. In the flow chart, add the symbol (+) with the word "information". This flow chart would then look as follows:

? (a question) ——► A (an answer) + information

In the course of a lesson activity like a Role Play, when a student is not providing enough content in his or her response, the teacher can simply point to this "equation" of conversation and draw the student's attention to the fact that he or she needs to add more. This would be better than interrupting the activity. Interruption of the activity destroys the chance for the student to take charge of the conversational interaction and reminds the student of the presence of the teacher. But as it is an instructional situation, the teacher needs to give some guidance. This suggested method is the least intrusive. At higher levels, the teacher can expand on the meaning of the word "information" by substituting it with phrases such as DETAILED RESPONSE; MAKE A SUGGESTION; MAKE A PROMISE, EXPLAIN etc. In addition, the teacher may want to explain to students that in conversation some comment is usually given that will lead to the asking of a question and thus add the word "talk" before the ? symbol in the flow chart. Finally, depending on the function being practiced, the adjacency pair in this flow chart can be substituted with others. For example in the case of an invitation the flow chart would look like this:

Talk + ? (invitation) ——►
A (response: acceptance/refusal) + explanation

To create an environment where students do not feel they have to submit to the control of the teacher, teachers should do the following:

1) Encourage students to ask each other for help if they cannot answer a question. Peer support and peer instruction needs to be fostered.
2) Encourage students to communicate with their teacher whether they are thinking, working out how to answer in English or just simply have no idea of the answer. It often happens that teachers do not know which it is and "too quickly" turn to another student for the answer. The students need to be taught phrases like "Give me a minute, I am thinking" or " I have no idea". This way the teacher knows whether to wait for an answer or not. For the

student, he or she will feel less embarrassed if not able to give the answer. Students feel pressured to answer quickly and correctly when they are asked a question.

3) Teachers, when assigning a group activity, need to abdicate the management role to the group. The assigning of roles and organization should be done by them. This is a good chance for students to use their L2 and also for negotiation and interaction to take place.
4) Students should also be encouraged to interrupt each other, add to each others comments and to try to speak out more of their own free will than to wait to be asked to answer a question. Conversely, teachers should more often call on anyone to answer rather than selecting a student each time.

It is quite possible that teachers may not realize that in their attempt to "get started" on an activity or by calling on students, they are robbing their students of a learning opportunity. And likewise with students, their giving over too readily to the power of the teacher, denies them the chance of learning interaction skills important to conversation. Both teachers and students need to be aware that the typical classroom power status is not conducive to learning a language as it inhibits practicing the elements of conversation such as turn-taking. In addition, students need to be shown that there is more to speaking fluently than just using correct grammar and vocabulary. They need to rely on their Japanese conversational skills as an initial source from which they can by comparison confirm similarities or differences and then identify which L1 practices they can employ from their L1 conversation style or which new practices they need to learn to speak more naturally. Teachers need to conduct less teacher-centered classes and opt for making their lessons more like workshops.

In summary, this paper has put forth the argument that Classroom Discourse inhibits and influences the development of a learner's conversation discourse style. In other words, although most language classes are labeled conversation courses with the goal being to "teach" conversation, the classroom situation (the power relationship, the past experiences of teachers and students, the expectations and practices of the teachers and students) contributes to making a particular genre of discourse (Classroom Discourse) that does not allow for the learner to fully develop a natural conversation style. But instead results in L2 learners speaking in a discourse style typical of the classroom situation. A description of teaching practice that would help avoid this problem and initiate in the students a sense of language awareness was given. Language instruction should not only be on using language. It should include the knowledge of how to interact in the TL. To further investigate this issue, an analysis was of made of the performance of two foreign language students in a Role Play activity and of the teacher's influence on their performance.

A Case Study of a Role Play Activity

For the purposes of this paper an analysis was made of a Role Play as it was performed in a language classroom situation by two lower intermediate language learners. The intent being to examine how the classroom situation and the presence of the teacher (looking at the teacher for correction, confirmation of accuracy, permission to proceed and verbal interruption by the teacher) influenced the students' performance. And furthermore, to determine firstly, whether the speaking style of the students conformed to that of Classroom Discourse and in particular the very limited pattern of trading questions for answers in turn and secondly, the types of turn-taking used by the role play participants.

The Role Play Activity

In theory the Role Play activity would seem to allow for students to practice conversation while acting out a situation but as the case study of this paper shows, the teacher's presence and influence prohibits this. The expectation of a Role Play activity is that students will imagine themselves to be in the roles of the prescribed situation and to act out what they would say in such a situation. It is a very commonly used activity in some courses. The success of the Role Play activity as instructional method depends on how it is set up and prepared for and on how much influence the teacher has during the acting.

At the language school on Helderberg College campus, the Role Play activity is a standard activity in the Lower Intermediate Conversation Course taught in the intensive English program. The course text prescribes various role play situations which provide the students with a chance to employ a collection of functional phrases that the lesson has focused on. In the text of the Lower Intermediate Conversation course, the Role Play activity is the final activity of a unit that has for example as its theme complementing or asking for a favor. The preceding activities will have introduced the vocabulary and commonly used expressions, explained the phrases and given examples of how they are used in conversation situations. Typically, students will be given a short description of a situation and various tasks are outlined for each student to perform. The teacher gives student pairs time to write out their role play, practice it and then they have to perform it in front of the class. The students get opportunities to perform their prepared role plays in almost every class.

The Subjects

For the case study, I got permission to record on video a role play being acted out by students in the Lower Intermediate Conversation class. The class I recorded was a lower intermediate group of 14 adult students of various nationalities but mostly Chinese who had been in the course for 6 months already. Most of these students are studying English to enter the college undergraduate program. The students of this course were familiar with the Role Play activity and had performed role plays a number of times before in previous lessons. The role play I videotaped was performed by two Chinese students who had come to the

language school from China to study English for a year and then planned to enter an undergraduate university program. The students in the Role Play that I taped were chosen at random and not for their ability in comparison to the other students in the class.

The Role Play Situation

The Role Play they performed was a situation about two college roommates. One was preparing dinner for guests who would be coming shortly but could not find a particular pot needed to cook spaghetti. The other roommate was studying for a final test but feeling irritated by the noise being made in the kitchen and the TV that was turned up loud. The first roommate was tasked to ask about the whereabouts of the pot and to invite the second roommate to join the dinner. The second roommate was tasked to respond to the invitation, make some comment about her study progress and complain about the noise.

An Analysis and Discussion of the Recorded Role Play

In an analysis of the video tape and the role play dialog, it was found that the teacher during the role play continuously nodded his head giving feedback and interrupted the students a total of 12 times. This seemed to be the expectation of the students and also to encourage the students in their dependency on the teacher for confirmation of the acceptability of their utterances. Student A looked at the teacher for confirmation a total of 8 times and student B, a total of 6 times. This might seem appropriate in the classroom but is not what occurs in natural conversation. If it were a real conversation, feedback would come from the listener and would signal that what was being said was comprehended. The students were very aware of the teacher monitoring them and rather than seek confirmation of understanding from each other, they checked with the teacher. Their purpose might have been to get confirmation from the teacher that what they had said was grammatically correct or it might have been for confirmation that they had given the right response. This seems to be the case in the following example from the transcript:

a6 B: Oh it's 7 at 7am 7pm
A: OK (.) I will (X) go down (X) (LOOKS AT THE TEACHER)
Teacher: stairs? I'll go downstairs at 7
A: I'll go downstairs (.) at 7

In hindsight, an interview with each of the students might have given insight into this. But on the other, regardless of their purpose for looking at the teacher, the fact is that the teacher's presence did influence their performance and did seem to inhibit them. Towards

the end of the role play there were many silences (indicated by the symbol "X") and the teacher interrupted and prompted repeatedly. In the latter half of the role play when compared to the first part, the teacher's influence is very apparent.

In the way this role play activity was prepared, the students were not acting out the situation for the first time, they were performing something that they had collaborated on and rehearsed. Because of this, they knew the outcome and they knew what they each had to say. There was no need for the next utterance to be a response to what had been said before and so they could escape from having to analyze what was said. In a real situation the outcome would not be predictable and they would have to comprehend what was said before they could proceed. It was also noted that student B did not respond to information given, as in the sequence to a5 (see the example below) which shows that the fact that guests were coming is treated as common knowledge rather than as unknown and new information. And so student A does not get clarification or react to this information.

a5 A: thank you (X) I'd like (.) um join you for dinner
B: my friend want to meet you
q6 A: what is the dinner at?

Both these problems deny the learners of turn-taking opportunities and of chances for spontaneous interjections that would lead to the development of a more natural conversation speaking style. It was also noted that the students' dialog is mostly a question-answer sequence. The conversation pattern from q1 to q5 is just a series of questions and answers, not unlike classroom discourse. Typically too, the answers provide only the information required by the question and nothing else that would make the dialog more "conversational". In conversation however, this type of answer would seem insubstantial and breaks Grice's cooperation principle. There are two kinds of repair in this role play. The first, common to conversation (Levinson, 1983) and the second is when the teacher made corrections. Twice student B corrected herself (e.g. "bring back it" was correct to: "bring it back") and student A once, latching with the teacher's correction in q6. There is very little repair of the kind that clarifies information and there are times when the students do not inquire further into questionable statements or information given, as discussed above. In this role play there was no serious misunderstanding or divergence of conversation but student A did not question who the 'us' was that was coming to dinner (see the transcript, q5) nor did student A get clarification of the meaning of student B's offer to 'wait'. It is because they already clearly understand the situation and do not depend on their deriving "real time" understanding. Rather it would seem that they are focused on repeating what they had prepared previously and there was no pressure to interact or react. Further analysis of the role play shows that no pre-sequencing occurs. The content of the utterances is strictly informational and focused on

the assigned task (e.g. ask about the pot). Student B does not say anything about having a party, about the need to cook spaghetti, about not being able to find the big pot or which pot exactly it is, but asks q1 almost immediately without giving the necessary information. Similarly, student B says nothing much about Tony borrowing the pot, just that he borrowed it. This style of speaking may be caused by the classroom environment where it is seldom that a student has to explain the background to a question. This is the failing of a role play conducted in this manner where the students are explained the situation before hand, told to prepare a role play and perform their corrected script before the class. The correction and clarification of the participants in this language exercise was taken over by the teacher or tacitly given over by the students. The students did not feel the responsibility of a person in a "real time" conversation.

One would almost wonder what was being examined by the teacher when the students were performing the role play. It would seem that in the manner that the role play was prepared and conducted, the activity became an examination of how well the students could memorize a scripted scene. A role play conducted in this manner does not serve as an activity to improve the conversational ability of the learner.

Conclusion

The Role Play activity has a lot of potential for making students aware of how to use language. The teacher needs to revise the way the activity is done. It would be better if the teacher had each student write their own role play. The teacher can then have them review their scripts to find where they have not given enough information – pre-sequencing or explanation and detail. Students can perform the role play in pairs for language practice and fluency practice in phrases that are targeted in the lesson but without trying to follow the scripts. Then for language awareness development, the teacher can have a different pair perform in front of the class. This will force them to focus on the speech content of their interlocutor which will allow for a more natural conversational style. Before their performance, the teacher can have a discussion on a chosen topic like for example, turn-taking. The listening students can be tasked with noting the number of turns each participant in the role play has and how they were given over or taken. Similarly, another task could for the audience to spot instances where clarification was given, or not. The teacher should join the students in the task and sit in a place at the back of the class so as not to influence the students or be tempted to "jump in" to assist or correct. After the students have performed for the class, the teacher can get reports from the students and lead a discussion on the language awareness topic of the task they were set.

The classroom is a place of learning and a place where students can 'safely' practice without inhibition and fear. For this to occur the teacher needs be aware of the teacher-

student power relationship and of the common pattern and style of classroom discourse. The teacher has to review his or her teaching style and way of interacting with the students so that these two factors do not inhibit a student's conversational development. Teachers need also to add to their curriculum a component of language awareness instruction to inform students of how language is used and to advance their speaking to a higher level.

Appendix

Transcript of the Role Play

A: hh Vicky can I come her-here?
B: Come in
A: Thank you
B: Pleased have a seat
A: Yes
q1 B: So er (X) Have you seen the big (X) big pot?
a1 A: Yes ( )Tony borrowed it 2 days 2: 2days ago he didn't still bring it back
B: Oh I see I'll er (.) I'll go there (.) to (.) bring back it bring it back
A: I think so (X) (LOOKS AT THE TEACHER)
Teacher: (indistinguishable)
q2 B: What WHA-What are you going what are you doing now?
a2 A: I am er (.) I am writing a final report (X) for (X) meeting tomorrow.
q3 B: oh um do you want me to: um (X) turn (X)
Teacher: (TEACHER PROMPTS)
B: turn down the TV?
a3 A: Yes (.) I hope so
Teacher: I would like you to turn down the TV?
A I would like you to turn down the TV (X)
Teacher: (TEACHER PROMPTS)
q4 A: What are you doing in the kitchen?
a4q5 B: Yes um I'm making (.) spaghetti (.) hh would you like to (X) would you like to ( ) to um (.) join us (.) for dinner?
a5 A: Thank you (X) I'd like to join you for dinner
B: My friend want to meet you
q6 A: What is the dinner at?
Teacher: When=
A: =when is the dinner at?
a6 B: Oh it's: 7 at 7am 7pm
A: OK (.) I will (X) go down (X) (LOOKS AT THE TEACHER)
Teacher: stairs? I'll go downstairs at 7
A: I'll go downstairs (.) at 7
B: Yeah I wait I'm hh
Teacher: (indistinguishable)

B: I'm a hh (indistinguishable L1) (X) I (X) (LOOKS AT THE TEACHER)
Teacher: (indistinguishable)
B: I I I'll make (X) some spaghetti (X) make well
Teacher: (TEACHER PROMPTS)
Teacher: I make spaghetti (.) what are you going to do for her?
Are you going to make extra spaghetti for her? Since she is going to come?
B: I'm going to make (X) I'm going to make some spaghetti for you=
Teacher: =right
A: I am looking forward hh (X) forward to eating your spaghetti.
Teacher: (indistinguishable)
A: See you
B: See you
Teacher: Are you going to turn down the TV?
B: Yes yes um (.) I am going to turn (.) turn down the TV right now see you
Teacher: See you

Symbols Used:

(X) - long silences – there is no means of measuring the length of silence so this is determined entirely on intuition.
: - hesitations – medium length pauses
(.) - fairly short pauses described in Levinson (1983) as being approximately the duration of a syllable
? - to indicate a rising intonation
= - 'latched' utterances
a - an answer
q - a question

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