Students' Output in Communicative Language Teaching Classrooms

Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah
Normala Othman

Abstract

One of the conditions that have been claimed to be theoretically necessary for Second Language Acquisition is the production of modified output by learners. The objective of the present study is to assess whether this condition is present in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) classrooms studied. In the CLT approach, the focus is on communication, as opposed to grammar, as this is believed to lead to an improvement in language learning and acquisition in students. Data for the study was collected from two classes at beginners and intermediate levels in a university in Malaysia. The teachers' classroom interactions with the students were audio taped and analyzed to identify occurrences of signals that would invite modified output from the learners. Results of the study show that the opportunities for the production of output were not always available to the students. These results suggest the need for adjustments by the teachers during the classroom interaction process to encourage communication and enhance language learning.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' use of questions in the communicative language teaching classroom (CLT) in the ESL context. Research that offers theoretical and empirical claims with respect to the conditions that are necessary for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is vast. One of these conditions, which is the basis for this paper, is that learners should speak up especially in the classroom, about the only place where students learning English in a country where English is not a native language are fully exposed to the language.

In Malaysia, for instance, many leading academicians have pointed out that many local graduates are not capable of competing at the international level or making themselves marketable after graduation due to the lack of fluency (Yusuf, 2002). In fact, according to official statistics, only about 50 percent of Malaysians are literate in English (Richardson, 2002) and this does not provide an environment strong enough for the learner to immerse himself in the use of English. Many

methods and approaches to teaching and learning have been advocated over the years in the country to inculcate the much coveted speaking and communicative skills. Some ways include collaborative learning, task-based learning and the much recent one being problem-based learning (Duek, 2000; Rhem, 2003). Problem-based learning, which involves giving students a problem to solve in the form of a long question, is according to Tan (2003), the most significant innovation in professional education in the past decades and should be implemented without hesitation. Perhaps, if such approaches that require students to give more input in the class are carried out in the ESL classroom, it would initiate many more opportunities for the teacher to ask clarification questions and the students to produce modified input.

Modified output reflects critical thinking, another coveted skill, which is something that we need to do everyday; in many cases it comes naturally to us as we evaluate and decide on a preference. In actual case, it requires making active, persistent and careful judgments (Epstein, 2003) and must be nurtured among students. Encouraging modified output from students will allow them the opportunity to produce well-thought responses, which in turn can be the guideposts to the production of accurate language and communication.

From the teacher's perspective, one way to get students to speak up in class is to have the teacher facilitate the process by providing opportunities to the students for the production of modified output, which refers to the modification of an earlier utterance in response to a question or statement made by the hearer, in this case the teacher, in seeking clarification. In the context of the ESL classroom, students should consistently be provided with opportunities to modify their output for the purpose of getting them to perform in the classroom to improve their competence in English. Although research in the area of ESL shows that students' performance can be encouraged by various teaching approaches such as collaborative learning, group-work or task-based learning, simple questions by the teacher would also present enough impetus for students to perform.

Modified output from the student informs the teacher that they have understood the lesson, and that comprehension has taken place. If the teachers perceive from the modified output that the student has not understood something, they can use the information to adapt their teaching methods to help the student understand the lesson. This is the reason why questions from the teacher are necessary, especially in the CLT classroom. They facilitate communication and learning. When learners speak up in class, they would be producing what Swain (1985, p.252) describes as "comprehensible output," which she maintains is a necessary mechanism of language acquisition regardless of input. Swain argues that while learners need to be "pushed" to produce modified output, most learners, particularly those in the content classrooms she studied were not given sufficient

opportunities for the production of output. Swain (1985) argued that there is an important role to be played by learner's comprehensible output. She argues that while most language classes pay attention only to comprehensible input (Krashen 1981), its impact on grammatical development has been overstated in previous research, and the role that interactional exchanges play in second language acquisition may have as much to do with the learner's production of comprehensible output as it has to do with the learner's access to comprehensible input. While Krashen (1981) considered the role of output as that of only generating more comprehensible input, Swain claims that it provides an opportunity for learners to use their linguistic resources meaningfully.

Swain's position was based on her research on the language achievement of students in immersion classrooms, where greater emphasis was placed on students' comprehension of input than to the comprehensibility of their output. Test results indicated that learners' spoken second language (L2) production lagged behind their other language skills. She also examined features of communicative competence—grammatical, discourse, and sociolinguistics (Canale and Swain, 1980)—found in French L2 students and found that these students failed to achieve native speaker grammatical competence in their L2 as expected of learners in an immersion program. Many factors could have contributed to this and one is that the learners were not given the opportunities to speak up in the classroom; therefore, there was insufficient comprehensible output with which teachers can gauge and improve their teaching methods to help the students understand the lessons. This is further supported by studies which show that opportunities for ESL students to engage in negotiated interactions were not readily available in the classrooms (Sotillo, 1991; Allen, Swain, Harley, and Cummins, 1990; Swain, 1985). In other words, the students' output in these classrooms were restricted.

Swain's seminal research on comprehensible output has been further investigated from the point of view of different learner and contextual factors (e.g. gender difference and task type). A number of studies considered the effect of gender and found that gender difference plays a role in the non-native speaker's production of Comprehensible Output (e.g., Pica et al., 1989; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, & Newman, 1991; Shehadeh, 1994). Research has also found that task type can provide learners with varied opportunities for modified output (Iwashita, 1999; Shehadeh, 1999a). The extent to which modified output is brought to the learner's attention by external feedback (i.e., other-initiation) or internal feedback/noticing (i.e. other-initiation) has also been considered (Shehadeh, 1999a, 2001).

The responsibility of getting the students to speak up in the classroom lies mainly on the teacher who plays a central role in classroom management. In our study, the teacher's role in providing the opportunities for students to produce modified

(NNS) across several tasks. The study described how second language learners responded linguistically when native speakers, who are the teachers, signaled difficulty in understanding. The NS signal had a significant impact on the type of response NNSs made to it. It was found that NNSs tended to modify their output most often when NSs signaled an explicit need for clarification. These signals which are forms of questions can be seen in the following exchanges between the teacher and students (from Pica et al., 1989), which illustrate the production of modified output, shown in italics, by the students:

(1)	**NNS (Student)**	**NS (Teacher)**
	we have common patton in this case	I don't know that word…can you describe what it means?
	yes uuh uh if I can explain the car's nature, we understand easy because car has a few-a lot of nature ...	

(2)	**NNS**	**NS**
	They're using the mark of bowel, huh?	the what?
	is just round and sun……like a Japanese flag, huh?	

In (1), the teacher has asked a question that can be typically categorized as a clarification request as the student is forced to explain the word "patton.' The student in responding to the question modifies his previous utterance semantically through the synonym "nature." In this exchange we can see that the interaction is kept alive by the teacher's form of questioning; the student was not distracted from the main topic. In (2), another clarification request was posed by teacher, this time on the student's use of the phrase '...mark of bowel… .' In response to the clarification request, the NNS modifies his utterance through an example, '…round and sun…like a Japanese flag…'

The results of the study showed that comprehensible output was very much an outcome of the linguistic demands placed on the learners by the teacher in the course of their negotiated interaction. According to the researchers, in modifying their output, the learners may also have been engaged in language acquisition as they are actively internalizing new forms when they perform. The researchers proposed that in modifying their output, learners "test hypotheses about the second language, experiment with new structures and forms, expand and exploit their interlanguage resources in creative ways" (Pica et al., p. 64). The continuous testing, accepting and rejecting of beliefs is also suggested by Gass and Selinker (1994) in their proposed model of second language acquisition.

Swain and Lapkin (1995) in an empirical study, argue that in producing L2, learners will on occasion become aware of a linguistic problem. This awareness can "push" learners to modify their output wherein learners may sometimes be forced into a syntactic processing mode. Specifically, they argue that problems that arise while producing the L2 can trigger cognitive processes that are involved in second language learning. If so, then learners should be made to produce output i.e., speak up and in the L2 classroom, the teacher should play a distinct role in providing the opportunities for them to do so.

Given that the classroom is the major arena for language learning and acquisition especially for the second language, students should be provided with meaningful interactions that, in turn would allow them to produce meaningful utterances. One of the more commonly used ways of eliciting interactions in the class is the question/answer method due to the constraints inherently present in the syllabus-bound classes. Teachers need to know how to use the question-and-answer method in a way that would maximize learning and acquisition. This study aimed at showing teachers that the right questions can be useful to elicit language production and not only to test students' content knowledge. Eliciting language production produces modified output from the students which in the long run may prove valuable in the learning of communicative skills.

The Study

The present study intended to look at the modified output of students in the ESL classroom which focuses on communicative language teaching (CLT). The CLT classroom was chosen for the study because it requires communication, and for this to happen the teacher would have to ask questions in order to encourage students to speak up. The modified output by the students analyzed in this study are those prompted by the two types of teacher responses as mentioned earlier: (1) clarification requests, and (2) confirmation checks (Long, 1980). Research findings of content classrooms discussed in the above sections have shown that these classrooms seemed to lack conditions considered essential for language learning (Allen, Swain, Harley, and Cummins, 1990; Pica, 1995; Swain, 1985, 1991). Learners' production of modified output are lacking in these classrooms (Allen, Swain, Harley, and Cummins, 1990; Swain, 1991). In terms of output, it was found that the opportunities to produce sustained output were also lacking (Allen et al., 1990). As a result, students may not emerge from these classrooms with sufficient control of the L2.

The following research question informed the study:

Do the classes in this study provide learners with the opportunities for the production of modified output?

The classes that were chosen for this study focused on CLT. CLT classrooms were chosen due to the fact the major learning outcome aimed at is that students should be able to communicate well at the end of the semester. Therefore, a lot of negotiated interactions were expected between teacher and students, which would allow for the collection of a sizable amount of data. The analysis was done on data (questions) collected from the teachers' responses (questions) to the students' output. The teachers were the focal point of the study since they play an important role in classroom interaction. In fact, the extent of students' participation is in large part due to the teacher's initiative in creating the situations for them to do so. In addition to teaching, the main role of language teachers is often considered to be one of providing feedback and input. What teachers say have an important effect on student learning. With respect to the research question and hypothesis, the type of opportunities given to students during classroom interaction is likely to determine whether they are enough for students to modify their output.

In order to answer the research question stated earlier, the following hypothesis was formulated.

CLT classrooms provide fewer opportunities for students to modify their original production than to confirm their teachers' interpretation of their original production.

This hypothesis was based on, firstly, research which showed that teacher-student interaction in the classroom context is often characterized by a social relationship which confers on them unequal status as classroom participants, thereby inhibiting successful L2 comprehension and production (Pica, 1987). Most classroom interaction is structured in such a way as to allow students to display to their teacher their knowledge and skills. The teacher is perceived as both language and content expert and evaluator while the students come to the class as subordinates, seeking the teacher's expertise and guidance in language learning. Generally, it is the teacher who decides what knowledge and skills are to be displayed by the students. Teachers follow up students' display with commentary or feedback. This interactional relationship between the teacher and student has been well-documented in research (Mehan 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Long, 1983 cited in Pica, 1987).

The role of the teacher as the language expert and evaluator and as the person who controls what is to be displayed by the students, and the students as subordinates, combined with the interactional sequence of teacher initiation, student display, and teacher commentary or correction is likely to affect (1) the opportunities available for the students to speak up in response to the teacher, and (2) the teacher's responses to students' utterances. The teacher's utterances are categorized as "clarification requests," which require more detail from the

students, and "confirmation checks," which require a "Yes/No" response from the students. Details and examples of these are provided in the next section.

Teachers' knowledge of their students' language proficiency levels is also likely to lead to fewer use of clarification requests than confirmation checks. Teachers teaching a lower level English proficiency class may avoid using clarification requests as these request involve extended negotiation sequences which might be difficult for the students; whereas confirmation checks might be much easier as it allows teachers to give model utterances of "yes-no" questions. Also, the teachers, based on their knowledge of their students' proficiency levels, are aware that their students have limited linguistic resources to draw from in modifying their output when signaled to do so. Thus, teachers are likely to feel less inclined to use clarification requests and more inclined to use confirmation checks depending on the group they are teaching.

Based on the above two motivations, it was predicted that CLT in ESL classrooms would provide fewer opportunities for students to modify their original production than opportunities for students to confirm their teachers' interpretation of their original production.

Method

Activities

Data for the study came from two ESL classes, one at the beginners level and the other, at the intermediate level. Both classes focused on the development of oral proficiency. The main activities of these classes were class discussion, group work, pair work and in-class presentation.

Participants

Participants in this study were two experienced ESL lecturers who possessed a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. Both had taught the two classes at the beginners and the intermediate levels a number of times. Learners at the beginners level were of 6 different nationalities while those at the intermediate level came mainly from Malaysia. The beginners' class consisted of 20 students while the intermediate consisted of 23 students.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a mini tape recorder during the many activities that were carried out in the classroom. All of these activities were interactions between the teacher and students.

Coding Procedures

The teacher-student interaction audiotaped for the study came from a variety of class activities. The number of opportunities teachers provided for students to modify their original production and opportunities for students to confirm their teachers' interpretation of their original production were measured by coding for instances of clarification requests and confirmation checks, respectively. This could reveal the extent to which the teachers provided students with opportunities for the production of modified output.

The audio-taped teacher-student interaction was coded by the researchers. The entire set of data was then coded using the categories set out for the study. To ensure the reliability of coding of data, a random sample of each of the categories used in the hypothesis was coded. The frequency of occurrence of the above categories was then counted. The inter-rater reliability for each of the categories was computed. The overall inter-rater reliability was .91. This figure was considered to be at a satisfactory level. After the inter-rater reliability was established, the entire set of transcripts was coded separately.

The following coding categories were used in the analysis: (1) clarification requests, and (2) confirmation checks. They were labeled as such and operationalized by Long (1980). The categories, features, and examples are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Categories, Features, and Examples of Conversational Moves

Types	Features	Examples
Clarification requests	These are moves by which one speaker seeks assistance in understanding the other speaker's preceding utterance through questions (including *wh-* polar, disjunctive, uninverted with rising intonation, or tag), statements such as *I don't understand*, or imperatives such as *Please repeat* (cited in Pica et al. 1987). A move is a minimal verbal and/or nonverbal exchange contribution by the interactants.	**Example: 1** T: How do you find the perimeter of a square? NNS: You add all. T: *What?* NNS: You add all the sides of the square.
Confirmation checks	These are moves by which one speaker seeks confirmation of the other's preceding utterance through repetition, with rising intonation, of what was perceived to be all or part of the preceding utterance (cited in Pica et al. 1987).	**Example: 2** T: How do you find the perimeter of a square? NNS: Add the length of all the sides. T: *So you add the length of all the sides?* NNS: Yes.

Example 1 shows the use of a clarification request. The teacher in this instance sought assistance in understanding the student's preceding utterance "You add all" by using a wh- question, "What?" In response, the student clarified his previous utterance by saying "You add all the sides of the square." This feature (clarification request) was particularly chosen with respect to the hypothesis because Pica et al. (1989), in their study, showed that NNSs tend to produce modified output most often in respond to NSs' signal for explicit clarification.

Example 2 illustrates the use of a confirmation check by the teacher. Here, the teacher sought confirmation of the NNS's utterance by asking: "So you add the length of all the sides?" The NNS confirmed by answering "Yes."

This feature was chosen with respect to the hypothesis on the basis of Pica et al. (1989) study which found that there was a tendency for NSs when encoding signals of misunderstanding to provide a model utterance for NNSs who would simply have to give "yes" or "no" answers. The use of confirmation checks by the teachers has been shown to have a different effect on the production of modified output compared to clarification requests (Pica et al., 1989).

In general, research on language acquisition has dwelled on the input students received, that is how much input do they receive, how meaningful is the input to the students, the quality of the input, etcetera. The field is still wide open to more studies on second language acquisition as opposed to first language acquisition. Secondly, studies that have been done on second language acquisition emphasised on factors away from the students, that is input, as important in language learning. Although there has been some research on output from students as an affective factor of language learning, these are far and in between. The present study was carried out to fill the gap in the literature pertaining to ESL studies in Malaysia in the area of CLT with a focus on students' modified output.

Hypothesis Testing and Data Analysis

The hypothesis was tested by counting and comparing the teachers' clarification requests and confirmation checks in teacher-student oral interaction in the two classes. The frequencies of clarification requests and confirmation checks were counted. Proportions of clarification requests and confirmation checks were obtained from the total number of these two features.

The data for this hypothesis were analyzed by, first, computing the frequencies for clarification requests and confirmation. Then, the proportions for clarification and confirmation requests were computed. Finally, these proportions were converted to percentages and were compared to test the hypothesis that there would be fewer teacher signals that invited students to modify the students' production than to confirm the teacher's interpretation of the students' production.

Results

This section reports on the results of the tests of the hypothesis formulated for this study and carried out through the chi-square analysis, the statistical method by which the respective teacher utterances in the hypothesis were compared. Tables and figures are then presented to show the frequency and the percentage of the results.

The hypothesis for the study predicted that CLT classrooms would provide fewer opportunities for students to modify their original production than to confirm their teachers' interpretation of their original production. This hypothesis was tested by counting and comparing teachers' clarification requests and confirmation checks in the two classes.

The hypothesis was supported by the data from both the classes. The differences observed in the teacher's use of clarification requests and confirmation checks in both the classes were statistically significant: Beginners $X2=22.77$, $df=1$, $p<.05$ and Intermediate $X2=8.35$, $df=1$, $p<.05$.

The results for the hypothesis are presented in tables 2 and 3 below. Table 2 shows frequency and percentage of clarification requests and confirmation checks for the beginners class. There was a total of 97 clarification requests and confirmation checks in the data. Out of this, 25 (26%) were clarification requests while 72 (74%) were confirmation checks.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Clarification Requests and Confirmation Checks used by the Teacher in the Beginners' Class

Clarification requests		Confirmation checks		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%
25	26	72	74	97	100
$X2=22.77$, $df=1$, $p<.05$					

Table 3 shows frequency and percentage of clarification requests and confirmation checks for the Intermediate class. There was a total of 58 clarification requests and confirmation checks in the data. Out of this, 18 (31%) were clarification requests while 40 (69%) were confirmation checks.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Clarification Requests and Confirmation Checks used by the Teacher in the Intermediate Class

Clarification requests		Confirmation checks		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%
18	31	40	69	58	100
X2=8.35, df=1, p <.05					

The above results are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of Clarification Requests and Confirmation Checks used by the Beginning and Intermediate classTeachers

	Clarification Requests		Confirmation Checks		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
Beginner	25	26	72	74	97	100
Intermediate	18	31	40	69	58	100

Discussion of the Results

This section discusses and interprets the results of the hypothesis formulated for this study. The main research question for this study was whether CLT learners were provided with opportunities for the production of modified output. The main purpose of the discussion that follows is to highlight whether each of the classrooms provided this condition for language learning.

The hypothesis for the study predicted that CLT classrooms would provide fewer opportunities for students to modify their original production than to confirm their teachers' interpretation of their original production. The prediction was supported in both the beginners and the intermediate classes. The results are discussed with respect to the following salient points: teacher's teaching style; use of confirmation checks to check students' understanding of content; information flow in class; knowledge and assumption about students' knowledge of language; and the use of comprehension questions and comprehension checks.

Use of clarification requests and confirmation checks by the teachers

The data from both the Beginners and the Intermediate classes showed a preponderance of confirmation checks as compared to clarification requests (see Table 2 and 3). The teachers' classroom methodologies demonstrated a control

of the learning situations, with the information flow being mainly from teachers to students, but not vice versa. There was very little two-way exchange of information. Clarification requests generally reflect a two-way exchange information. The teachers' focus on content, their tight control of the learning situations, and the one-way flow of information in their classes might have led to a significantly greater incidence of the teacher inviting students to confirm his or her interpretation of their production, rather than the teacher providing signals inviting students to modify their production.

It was also found that the teachers' knowledge and assumptions about their students' knowledge of English seemed to have influenced the results. The teachers informed the researchers about their students' background and knowledge of the English Language. Students from both the classes were of low language proficiencies and, therefore, it was necessary for them to simplify ideas because of their background. The need to simplify might have caused them to use fewer clarification requests and more confirmation checks.

In both the classes, the ease in checking students' comprehension of what was presented using confirmation checks in relation to clarification requests seemed to have resulted in the teachers in both classes using more confirmation checks in relation to clarification requests. Confirmation checks provide an easier and quicker way of checking students' comprehension than clarification requests; in using the former all the teachers had to do was provide a model utterance for confirmation, whereas with the latter, they would have required a modification of the students' previous utterances which might be considered difficult, knowing the proficiency level of the students. Confirmation checks also appeared to have been used more than clarification requests, as the former are more suited to providing comprehensible input rather than the latter. The use of the latter would have required students to modify their own utterances, which the teacher might have considered unnecessary, given his/her focus on comprehension of content.

Even though the proportion of confirmation checks used by the teachers was greater than clarification requests, it must be noted that the proportion was still small when considered as a proportion of the total number of utterances under study. There were 25 clarification requests out of a total of 551 utterances in the at the Beginners level while there were 18 clarification requests out of a total of 621 utterances at the Intermediate level. An explanation was sought for the low occurrence of clarification requests and confirmation checks. A closer examination of the data for other possible classroom interaction processes showed that the teachers generally made very frequent use of comprehension questions and comprehension checks. It is significant to report that although comprehension checks were not part of the actual study, their frequent occurrence in the data indicated their specific function in the class. There was a much greater occurrence

of comprehension checks compared to clarification requests or confirmation checks. Their frequent occurrences compared to clarification requests or confirmation checks might be explained by the teachers' larger focus on content understanding. The data showed the teachers eliciting and verifying content specific information. Their preference for comprehension checks in relation to clarification requests and confirmation checks may have been influenced by the fact that these were not advanced classes and the teachers felt the need to frequently check content understanding.

The teachers' preferences for comprehension checks compared to clarification requests and confirmation checks may also be due to their perception of the students' linguistic needs. They were well aware of the students' limited English proficiency and thus might have felt the need to make the content more explicit to these students. Comprehension checks and to a lesser degree, confirmation checks appeared to have been a strategy used to achieve this objective.

The much lower occurrence of clarification requests and the preponderance of comprehension checks may also be due to the teachers' familiarity with their students. Both the teachers had had many years of experience teaching students at both levels and were therefore familiar with the needs of their students with regard to language. Since they knew what the students needed and knew what they were deficient in, the teachers might not have felt the need for much use of clarification requests, as this would have implied that they were trying to gauge the students' needs, when in fact they were well aware of the needs of these students. This situation might have prompted them to use comprehension checks more so than clarification requests.

A third possible explanation for the lower occurrence of clarification requests may be found in the lack of opportunities for negotiation of meaning or exchange of information among the students in the classroom. The need for the negotiation of meaning generally arises when there is a real need for participants to achieve mutual understanding of the messages being exchanged. However, the familiarity of the teachers with the students, their perception of students' need to understand content, the outlook of the teachers themselves as people responsible for disseminating content material to students, and their perception of students as receivers of that knowledge, all add up to a lesser need for the negotiation of meaning. This could have influenced the teachers to use fewer clarification requests and more comprehension checks.

A final explanation for the lower occurrence of clarification requests may be the pervasive use of a type of question referred to as display questions. Display questions seek information that is already known to the teacher, as opposed to another type of less used questions, the referential questions, which require

students to provide information which is not known to the teacher (Long and Sato 1983; Long 1983c). Display questions are an integral part of the teaching of language, since the teacher as a specialist in the language would want to determine whether students possess information which the teacher already knows and which the students are expected to know. However, the overuse of display questions reduces the need for the teachers to ask clarification questions, as teachers are rarely in any doubt about what students are trying to say.

Implications

The results of chi-square tests on the frequency data for both the classes showed that the teachers in both the classes provided opportunities for students to modify their original production. However, the amount of such opportunities was negligible compared to opportunities to confirm the teachers' interpretation of their original production. However, the data from these classes also showed that these classes could be made more conducive for language learning, if shortcomings observed during classes are addressed, or conversely, if structures observed were promoted or developed. These shortcomings will be discussed in the context of implications of the study for ESL classroom practice. This section presents transcripts showing how the teachers could have provided features considered to assist SLA at different times during their interaction with their students.

The results of the present study showed that the teachers in the classes generally provided fewer signals that invited students to modify their production than signals that invited students to confirm their teachers' interpretation of the students' production. The latter was provided in the form of confirmation checks. Swain (1985) has shown that in producing the L2, a learner will on occasion become aware of a linguistic problem. This awareness would cause the learner to modify his or her output, and in doing so would improve his acquisition in the said language. Research has shown that an effective way for students to produce comprehensible, modified output is by making use of clarification requests, which are signals inviting students to modify their production (Pica et al., 1989). As has already been noted earlier, NNSs tend to modify their output most often when NSs signal an explicit need for clarification (Pica et al., 1989).

There are several ways the teachers could have provided opportunities for the students to produce modified output. One way is by turning confirmation checks into clarification requests i.e., by reducing the frequent use of Yes/No questions. Another way is by reducing the overuse of display questions. The following transcripts show the overuse of confirmation checks followed by a discussion on how the teacher could have signaled explicit needs for clarification.

Example One: Beginners

T: Birds that fly, they use wings (teacher demonstrates). There are many types of spiders. Some are tiny. You know what is tiny? T..i..n..y.

Ss: Yes.

T: Everyone knows what is tiny right?

Ss(some): Yes.

Ss(others): No.

T: Tiny means small, very small.

In the above transcript, the teacher asked a question, "You know what is tiny?" to which the students answered in the affirmative. The teacher followed this up with a confirmation check to which some students answered in the affirmative while the other answered in the negative. However, if the teacher had asked a question such as, "What is the meaning of tiny?" this might have brought about a negotiation of meaning. This would have provided opportunities for students to produce modified output.

The results also showed frequent use of "Yes/No" questions by teachers in the classes. This is typical of most teachers (Long & Sato, 1983). "Yes/No" questions, which require answers of 'Yes' or 'No' appeared to have reduced the opportunities for negotiation of meaning and thus the opportunities for the production of modified output by the students. The following transcript illustrates the use of "Yes/No" questions by the teachers:

Example Two: Intermediate

T: Leanorda da Vinci, Paul McCartney, Napolean, and John McEnroe, they all have something in common. They're all left-handed. 'in common' uh uh you understand what is 'in common'?

S: Yes.

T: Today 15% of the population in the world is left-handed.

In the above transcript from the Intermediate class, the Yes/No questions seemed to have diminished the opportunities for negotiation and thus the production of modified output. Instead of the "Yes/No" question, "...you understand what is 'in common'?" the teacher could have posed a question, such as, "What is the meaning of 'in common' ?" which would have elicited some response from the students. This could have been followed by a clarification request if it was found appropriate.

To minimize the overuse of display questions, which appeared to have reduced the opportunities for negotiation of meaning, teachers should ask students more open-ended questions that are likely to lead to negotiation of meaning. Since negotiation is initiated through signals such as clarification requests, teachers should be encouraged to invite these from students when students cannot understand the teacher.

Teachers should also make use of comprehension checks, since the above results show that they are fond of giving these to students, by using their answers students given in response to comprehension checks to encourage them to modify their output. What was observed was that to most of the incorrect responses from the students, the teachers provided feedback by giving the correct answers. This put a stop to the negotiation of meaning that could have taken place. If the teachers had encouraged the students by asking them to clarify their answers, this could have led to more modifications of output from the students.

As noted above, the presence of a large number of comprehension checks and confirmation checks indicated that the teachers were mainly concerned with checking and confirming content, not language. Confirmation checks and comprehension checks were visible markers of the teacher's tendency towards verifying whether students understood what they had said rather than reflecting on the teacher's interest in inducing students to produce language output. However, it was evident from the data that even with the frequent use of comprehension checks the teacher could still have provided opportunities for students to modify their output. The transcript below illustrates this point.

Example Three

T: Spiders are not insect. You know, what is an insect, insect? Insect is a small animal like ants. You know ants? What are ants? It has got six legs (teacher draws on the white board) They belong to the anthropoid family.

The transcript above shows that opportunities for negotiation of meaning and production of modified output by the students were not available because the teacher asked and answered their own questions before the students could attempt to respond to them. The teacher in the above example further concluded with a comprehension check. Such a situation, while it ensured that students understood content, reduced the opportunities for negotiation of meaning. The above might be a feature of teacher-centered instruction, which did not help to facilitate the process of producing modified output. The teacher could have asked the questions and paused to allow the students to frame their answers. If a student makes an attempt to answer, but the message is not clear, the teacher could respond with a clarification request such as "what do you mean?" which would most likely lead to a modification of output by the student of his or her previous utterance.

Conclusion

The present study investigated whether students in the CLT classrooms produced modified output in response to teacher questions. This was investigated by determining the extent to which the teachers provided opportunities for the students to produce modified output. It was hypothesized that the CLT classrooms would provide opportunities for students to modify their original production than to confirm their teachers' production of their original production. The results showed that the teachers in the two classes did provide students with opportunities for the production of modified output consistent with claims made in SLA. However, these opportunities were negligible compared to the opportunities they provided to confirm their interpretation of their original production. In other words, the clarification requests they provided was negligible compared to confirmation checks. The results of the study show that CLT can be a better context for language learning if appropriate adjustments are made by teachers. Several important limitations should be noted. This research has only examined the classroom interaction of two teachers, one at the beginners level and the other, at the intermediate level. Further research is required to determine if these results would be applicable in other beginners level and intermediate classes. Research is also necessary in advanced level classes. Since provision of teacher signals is crucial in facilitating student production of modified output and thus for SLA, it would be appropriate to extend the present line of research to find out why teachers use confirmation checks rather than clarification requests. It is also important to investigate further as to why students do not always take up the opportunities to modify their output.

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