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Negotiation skills: teachers’ feedback as input strategy

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Abstract

Negotiation is one of the important skills required in workplace situations. It needs a highly complex set of knowledge and skills in order to bring a firm grasp of the subject under discussion. For a successful negotiation, an individual should possess good command of the language and communication skills. However, students fail to use the appropriate language expressions in “negotiation” simulation. Therefore, this study attempts to help students in carrying out “negotiation” simulation effectively by utilizing teacher’s feedback as an input strategy. Recent survey has shown that negotiation can be carried out based on experiential learning and simulations as a teaching tool. Feedback is a powerful tool for learning as it often challenges students’ way of expressing ideas and way of thinking. This paper aims to present review of literature related to the inquiry. A review of the literature was conducted using Sciencedirect, EBSCO, Taylor, Open Acess, Cambridge and other related databases. The findings will give insights on how to use feedback as a tool to help students in using the right language expressions which will enable them to perform effectively in “negotiation” simulation. It is hoped that this study will also assist teachers in providing constructive and meaningful feedback to students.

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Keywords: Communication skills; input strategy; language expressions; negotiation skills; teachers’ feedback

1. Introduction

Feedback is considered as an important ingredient and dominant tool in enhancing the process of teaching and learning in today’s classroom. It can be in a form of verbal and written comments. Various types of feedback have been employed by teachers which include peer feedback, conferencing, and written teacher-feedback, as well as more innovative methods such as the use of taped commentaries and computer-based response. Besides that, feedback may include facial expressions and body language of the speakers. Feedback has its influence on students’ learning process as it either strengthens or weakens students’ performance in the classroom. The impact of feedback can be either positive or negative depending on the way it is given.

In this study, feedback is referred to the verbal comments presented by teachers in the process of negotiation meetings in a workplace communication course. Teachers’ commentaries are delivered during conferencing sessions...
Students are expected to use appropriate language expressions in carrying out their negotiation meetings successfully. The language expressions include: asking for clarification, rejecting, interrupting, bargaining, making a suggestion, stating your position, agreeing and asking for a reaction. These expressions are assessed as part of students’ performance in the negotiation meeting. Nevertheless, students seem to be having difficulties in using appropriate and accurate expressions. They are found not to be using the appropriate language expressions in “meeting” simulation. This study is carried out to investigate to what extent teacher feedback and playback promote students’ language performance in “meeting” simulation and intends to suggest ways to improve students’ learning process through teacher’s feedback strategy. Feedback has been identified as a tool to help students in using the right language expressions which will enable them to perform effectively in the negotiation meeting.

This study will adopt an action research approach with an intervention procedure in a negotiation meeting simulation of a Workplace Communication class. Teacher’s feedback and playback are used as input strategy in the stages of the negotiation meeting simulation. This study will also examine students’ reflections on their performance and the selection of tasks in the negotiation meeting simulation. Findings of this study will assist language practitioners to improve their feedback as an effective input strategy in the classroom which will eventually help students to overcome their weaknesses in negotiating meetings. It is hoped students will be able to use the right language expressions and perform effectively in meetings and discussions in their future workplace situations. This inquiry on the literature review will assist the researchers in achieving the following objectives:

i. To identify the characteristics of effective teacher feedback
ii. To find out ways to improve students’ learning process through teacher feedback

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

Our review of theories related to the inquiry focuses on two background theories, namely the general theories of learning and ESL language learning theories. From general theories of learning perspective, the current inquiry on teacher feedback is related to cognitivist and constructivist theories as shown in the following Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Cognitivist</th>
<th>Constructivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theorists</td>
<td>Ausubel, Bruner, Gagne, Koffka, Kohler, Lewin, Piaget</td>
<td>Candy, Dewey, Lave, Piaget, Rogoff, von Glaserfeld, Vygotsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of the learning process</td>
<td>Internal mental process (inc. insight, info processing, memory, perception)</td>
<td>Construction of meaning from teacher feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of learning</td>
<td>Internal cognitive structuring</td>
<td>Internal construction of reality by individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of learning</td>
<td>Develop capacity and skills to learn better</td>
<td>Construct knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s role</td>
<td>Structures content of feedback so learning can be enhanced</td>
<td>Facilitates and negotiates meaning with learners through feedback given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2006.

Feedback is related to cognitivist theory in the sense that the learning process involved the internal process of the learner who internalizes feedback given by the teacher in order to achieve competence in his or her language learning. It also involves internal cognitive structuring where the learner processes and organises information from teacher feedback in his or her mind. With such an internal mental structuring, the learner is able to learn better. The teacher role is to structure content of feedback so learning can be enhanced. From constructivist point of view, the teacher feedback enables students to construct their own understanding. Thus, the role of the teacher is to guide the students’ understanding.
Among theories related to the inquiry are Krashen's Input Theory, Swain's Output Hypothesis, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Ma, 2006) as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Description of the theories</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krashen (2009) Input Theory</td>
<td>Two approaches in second language learning: (1) to acquire, (2) to learn. To acquire a second language, an ‘acquirer’ needs to develop a “feel for correctness”. To develop he or she must receive “comprehensible input” which requires attention to “communication that is understandable” rather than grammatical rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swain’s (2005) Output Hypothesis</td>
<td>Comprehensible output involves delivery of message that is conveyed precisely, coherently and appropriately. Three functions of output in second language learning: (1) the noticing/triggering effects, (2) the hypothesis-testing function, and (3) the metalinguistic (reflective) function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long et al.’s (1998) Interaction Hypothesis</td>
<td>Comprehensible input is important. Negotiation of meaning occurs where participants use various strategies in order to understand the communication. Feedback consists of positive evidence and negative feedback (error correction).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Krashen (2009) views two approaches used by adult learners to achieve language competence, acquisition and learning. Acquisition is when one is not consciously aware of the grammatical rules of the language, but develops a "feel" for correctness. Language learning, on the other hand, refers to the "conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them." Krashen's Input theory suggests that a language acquirer who is at "level i" must receive comprehensible input in order to "level i + 1". Instead of focusing on grammatical rules at "level i + 1", the language acquirer should focus more on communication that is understandable. Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis advances the notion of comprehensible output. The notion entails “the delivery of message that is not only conveyed but that is conveyed precisely, coherently and appropriately” (p.26). Three functions of output in second language learning are, namely(1) the noticing/triggering effects, (2) the hypothesis-testing function, and (3) the metalinguistic (reflective) function. The noticing/triggering function means that student is prompted to recognise his or her linguistic problem. The hypothesis-testing function states that a learner is able to test comprehensibility of his or her language through teacher feedback. The metalinguistic (reflective) function suggests that a learner is able to reflect language use of him or herself or others. Long et al.’s (1998) Interaction Hypothesis concurs with Krashen’s (2009) view that comprehensible input is important for a language acquirer. Negotiation of meaning occurs where participants use various strategies in order to understand the communication. Long (1998) also introduces the concepts of positive evidence and negative feedback (error correction).

2.2. Teacher feedback

Feedback is undeniably one of the indispensible tools in the process of teaching and learning in classrooms. It often challenges students to change the way they think, express or write ideas in accordance to the needs of the assigned task. Responding to teachers’ feedback will definitely allow sufficient room for students to explore their ideas or thoughts meaningfully and appropriately in constructing their knowledge and applying their skills for any assigned task. This is further intensified by Zacharias (2007) and Rogers (2001). Zacharias (2007) states that teacher feedback assists students as follows:

1. improve students reading and writing
2. influence students feelings
3. make meaningful revisions to students’ work
4. integrates peer feedback with confidence in revisions
5. excites students emotionally when getting teachers feedback

A study on students’ negotiation process was carried out by Jang and Stecklein (2011) where students discussed their ideas and generated understanding of science concepts in a science class. It has been discovered that evaluative feedback such as ‘this is correct’, ‘you’re right, ‘no, not that’ from teachers can discourage students’ conversation
during the negotiation. Teacher should produce more of formative feedback or a redirect. Redirects are the teacher’s comments or questions that can encourage students to further discuss about the topic. The teacher’s role here is not to highlight what is the right or wrong answer but to kindle students to share their ideas and to give remark on each other’s ideas.

Jang and Stecklein (2011) emphasise that teachers should focus more on the quality than the quantity of the feedback. Interference of teachers’ feedback should be less during the students’ discussion as to promote more discussion. Therefore, the limelight of the discussion is on the students and not the teacher. Nevertheless, at times teachers’ feedback or redirection such as eliciting, extending, rephrasing and application is needed to initiate students to voice out their thoughts and ideas.

Teacher feedback not only nurtures academic advancement but also addresses or explains student misconceptions on key elements of the subject content. Feedback also provides an avenue for the teacher to model correct responses. Notably, students evaluate their level of academic success on the basis of the feedback they receive from the teacher. For this reason, feedback lets students know that the teacher values their hard work and that it is not merely an endless stream of busy work.

2.3. Negotiation

Negotiation is one of the important skills required in workplace situations. It needs qualities and skills to be effective negotiators. According to Goldwich (2009), the qualities which will improve your chances of negotiating win-win agreements are as follows:

i) engage in mutual problem-solving
ii) share information
iii) ask questions
iv) listen and empathetically
v) explain before disagreeing
vi) persuade
vii) think laterally

The above qualities outlined by Goldwich (2009) clearly demonstrate ways how a negotiator will achieve a win-win situation, thus avoiding a win-lose outcome. Besides having these qualities, important techniques and skills which include the right language expressions need to be learnt and developed before one can become a successful negotiator. This study aims to help students to use the right language expressions to enable them to perform effectively in negotiation meetings.

3. Methodology

A review of the literature was conducted using Scienecedirect, EBSCO, Taylor, Open Acess, Cambridge and other related databases. The keywords used included negotiation, teacher’s feedback, communication skills, input strategy, meetings, constructive and meaningful feedback and peer assistance.

4. Findings and Discussion

It is important for teachers to recognize the characteristics of teacher feedback, as this will assist and improve students’ learning. Researchers have clearly pointed out the favourable characteristics of teacher feedback. Teachers’ feedback should be clear and focus certain aspects at one time. It is advisable that feedback should be prompt, closely following the event and contain encouragement. Rogers (2001) also points out that teacher should try to involve the students in self-assessment so that the students set their own goals and can tell the teacher how they think they are measuring up. Apparently, they can ask for advice and be made accountable of their responsibilities. Zacharias (2007) forwards some guidelines for teachers in giving feedback such as follows:

1. To give constructive and specific feedback to make students feel that they are making progress
2. To be extra careful when giving feedback
3. To allocate some time to speak to students individually on a regular basis to provide personal feedback

Rogers (2001) also cites that feedback is not helpful if it is vague or unclear. Teachers should avoid criticizing the person rather than the performance: e.g. you are not good at should be rephrased: This aspect needs more work. Besides that, unrealistic standards should not be imposed on students. Instead, teachers should be specific about why something was good or was not up to the standard and what the student can do about it. Studies have highlighted several reminders that should be avoided when giving feedback, Zacharias (2007) believes that too much feedback will make students depress and too little feedback will make students more motivated. He also notes that teachers should avoid showing favours among students when giving feedback and not to embarrass students when giving comments. Teachers are advised not to be judgmental in students’ contribution and not to highlight students’ individual names when correcting errors.

Teacher feedback is found to be useful in improving students’ learning process. Studies have proven that students view teacher responses as pertinent in helping them to get better grades. Students are well aware that it is the teacher has the ultimate control of the grades. They felt that if they did not follow the teacher feedback, teachers might give them low grades. Robb, Ross and Shortreed in Zacharias (2007) show that the extent to which students can make use of feedback is greatly related to a learner’s level of L2 acquisition. It is apparent that the identification of some grammatical errors that correspond with student current acquisition level may have a positive effect on student writing, but the identification of errors beyond the student’s current acquisition level will not. Therefore, teachers should be careful not to concentrate too much on errors in form that go beyond student present acquisition level.

Most studies on teacher feedback focus on writing and how it helps students in improving their work. Muncie (2000) regards feedback as vital to writing and in helping learners to improve their writing skills, producing a sense of reader awareness and giving the learner an outside view of the text. The technique used by Muncie in his study can usefully be added to a teacher's repertoire of feedback methods in helping learners to gain a feeling of autonomy in their writing, and in producing longer term. Muncie (2000) further illustrates that teacher’s feedback should be in the form of a genuine and interested reader rather than as a judge and evaluator.

Most researchers like Siewert (2011), Hyland (1998) view feedback in terms of its effects on students’ development of learning. Siewert (2011) cautiously emphasized the effects of feedback on students as it may potentially give adverse affect on students’ self-esteem. However, studies have shown that with continual practice and teacher feedback, students will continue to build self-esteem and acquire necessary academic skills. The presentation of teacher feedback has the potential to either harm or build the self-esteem of students. Therefore, when providing students with corrective feedback, teachers should be mindful that this interchange should not have a negative tone. In contrast, the focus should be on the positive aspects of student answers. For this reason, it is imperative that teachers use open-ended questions to draw out and build on the level of comprehension from all students. This type of interaction fosters self-esteem in the students while building critical thinking skills.

Hyland (1998) investigated the effects of teacher written feedback on revision process. He found that the use of teacher written feedback varies according to individual differences and student approaches to writing. To ensure the effectiveness of feedback, Hyland emphasizes the need to have more open dialogue on feedback given in order to prevent miscommunication and misunderstanding. Apparently, the above literature findings have provided some insights of significant characteristics of teacher’s feedback and its importance in improving students learning process. The useful ways in giving constructive feedback to students have also been highlighted in this literature review inquiry.

5. Conclusion

Literature review on teacher feedback clearly demonstrates that the use of feedback is fundamental in the process of developing students’ learning particularly in writing, speaking and negotiation skills. It is important that teachers know the characteristics of teacher feedback and how to utilize it as an input strategy in giving constructive comments on students’ progress in learning. Evidently, it is proven that positive and constructive feedback may strengthen students’ performance in the classroom.
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