

## Teaching Practices Promoting Communication Opportunities in the Language Class

SAMUEL S. POLIDEN  
*junglesam777@gmail.com*  
Benguet State University,  
La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines

**Abstract** - The study investigated the teaching practices that promote communication opportunities in the language class. Four teaching practices, six language functions and preferred error correction method were observed, recorded and analyzed using weighted means, frequency counts, percentages, ranks and the Cochran Q-test. Findings revealed that building on prior knowledge and communitarian teachings were predominantly used followed by multiple representations and protracted language event, the least. Eliciting, on the other hand was commonly used by the English teachers in engaging the students in classroom proceedings followed by evaluating, sociating, directing and organizing. The most preferred methods of correcting errors were for the teacher to point out the error and provide the correct form; and to explain why the utterance is incorrect. The study showed that teachers use varied teaching practices to provide communication opportunities for students. The study recommends that: (1) the use of multiple representations and protracted language event should also be utilized by teachers to provide students with varied activities and to develop with confidence their communication skills; (2) Activities given to students should be more challenging to encourage them to ask questions that develop their critical thinking; 3) Teachers should adopt more implicit error identification techniques for students to reflect on and repair their own errors.

*Keywords* - communication opportunities, teaching practices, teaching functions, error correction

## INTRODUCTION

The current trends in teaching English as a Second Language stress the importance of providing learners with opportunities for real and meaningful communication. This motivated the researcher to study the Teaching Practices Promoting Communication Opportunities in the Language Class.

Indeed, the natural way to learn a language is to use it, not just study it. In other words, English teachers teach the language not by focusing on the language itself, but by using it to talk about other things, particularly in real life situations and for academic purposes. This is a simple fact that lies at the heart of the reform of English language teaching. English teachers must fulfill what Kasper as cited by Cruz (2002) calls the main objective of teaching English as a second language. That is, students should be able to use the English language as a means of acquiring knowledge, in the process engaging in the active analysis, interpretation, critique and synthesis of information presented in English.

Today, language students are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in their second or foreign language, whereas two decades ago the accuracy of the language produced would most likely be the major criterion contributing to the judgment of a student's success or failure (Richards & Rodgers, 1987). These developments in language teaching - the promotion of "functional" or "communicative" ability have moved from the goal of accurate form toward a focus on fluency and communicative effectiveness.

This study will then inculcate in the minds of the language teachers that communication in the classroom should mirror the authentic communication that occurs in the real world. It should also encourage informal, unrehearsed use of language along with a relaxed classroom environment. This is because communication in language classes is an important link in the process of students' learning and thinking development. It provides a foundation for the development of other language skills. As students talk about themselves and their

experiences, they are learning to organize their thinking and to focus their ideas (Lyle 1993).

It is subsequently important to provide opportunities for oral communication to continue to grow in the language class. Before students achieve proficiency in reading and writing, oral communication is one of the important means of learning and of acquiring knowledge. Throughout life, oral language skills remain essential for communication of ideas and intelligent conversation.

Concomitant to the development of the communication skills of the students inside the language class is the growth in their confidence when communicating in a wide variety of social contexts to a wide variety of audiences. One of the most effective ways to facilitate oral communication is to take into account the background and everyday life experiences of the students.

Proficiency in oral communication is central to all learning, critically useful to the individual in all areas of life, and is a developmental process in which skills acquired early serve as a foundation for subsequent learning activities. The idea that communication could and should take place in the language class becomes more and more popular. With changes in practice come changes in roles and responsibilities. The role of the language teacher is no longer supposed to be that of the drill leader. Instead, the teacher is charged with providing language learners opportunities for communication, that is, opportunities to use the language in contexts other than memorized dialogues and pattern practices.

This study will also shed light on the kind of teaching practices teachers will utilize to promote communication opportunities for students. In this context, teachers would be able to devise language activities to enhance/negotiate meaning with their students. Moreover, language teachers take into account that learners learn in many ways and that the use of different teaching practices should be considered thus deviating from the traditional lecture method where the classroom setting is dominated by the teacher talk thereby depriving their students to use the second language.

Results of this study will enlighten language teachers to treat errors with tact and understanding to avoid a stigmatic effect on the learners. Thus, it is important to know how linguistic errors be handled by

language teachers as preferred by their students.

Findings of this study will help principals, head teachers, chairs of departments and administrators to evaluate language teachers on the variety of language practices they use in the classroom to create active participation in language class activities that would stimulate critical thinking thus creating opportunities for communication and interaction.

## FRAMEWORK

There are a number of theories and models for educational research on teaching practices to address effective learning. This study focused on the teaching practices, teaching functions, and preference of students on error treatment by teachers.

### Teaching Practices/Strategies

Individual differences play an important role in learning. Hence, the kinds of teaching practices used in the classroom that accomplish both course content goals and active engagement on the part of students depend on the teacher.

### Building prior knowledge.

Building on prior knowledge is an overall approach to teaching in which teachers work to connect students' lives to school themes. Nearly every effective lesson design model suggests that one of the first tasks of the teacher in the instructional event is the activation of prior knowledge.

Activation of prior knowledge serves as an important tool for the construction of meaning. This background knowledge can also serve to help students interpret new cultural information or contrast that information with values and practices common to their own culture. It means that the teacher's teaching should mirror the cultural background of the students. Teachers must also understand what students already know so they may build on the knowledge students have.

Schema building is related to one's ability to interpret text meaningfully. Schemata are the fundamental elements upon which all information processing depends and Rumelhart (1977) calls them the building blocks of cognition.

Brown and Yule (1983) also point out that background knowledge can guide and influence the comprehension process. He added that comprehension outcome is based on the previous knowledge of similar texts. That is, if the reader regularly reads a newspaper and is aware of all the events and issues either locally, nationally or internationally, then comprehension would be easier.

### Communitarian teaching.

Communitarian teaching practice is the first teaching practice uncovered by the qualitative research synthesis which was related to, but extended well beyond, what is commonly known as cooperative learning or collaborative learning.

Communitarian teaching practice provides increased time for communication and promotes the give and take necessary for negotiating meaning. It also opens the door for the students to engage themselves in communicative activities. It enhances language learning even when no student in a group has strong proficiency in English because it improves not only the learners' language skills but also allows them an opportunity to share their cultural frame with other students (Télliez, & Waxman, 2005).

One reason why communitarian teaching practice or cooperative learning provides increased time for communication and promotes the give and take necessary for negotiating meaning is that group members assume that they constantly assess their own speeches or actions in relation to that of their partners. This is because conversation is a collaborative enterprise that makes demands on both partners. Hence, negotiation and repair play a part in all interaction and are unique forms of language behavior involving non-native speakers.

Many experimental (and most often quantitative) studies have demonstrated the positive effects of cooperative learning among English Language Learners (ELLs) (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998). They generally believed that interactional learning

encouraged a strong form of social cooperation and discourse.

### Multiple representations.

Multiple representations rely heavily on the use of graphic organizers, juxtaposed text and images, films and other multimedia equipment. English teachers who use multiple representations help the students to remember easily vocabulary when they have acquired it by figuring out its meaning when watching a video, seeing the teacher act out words, or matching new vocabulary with pictures or real objects set in a meaningful context.

The use of multiple representations can enhance what learners read by reading and interpreting visuals accurately, and by creating their own related visuals. Vacca and Vacca (1993) believe that when students learn how to use and construct graphic representations, they are in control of a study strategy that allows them to identify what parts of a text are important, how ideas and concepts are encountered, and where they can find specific information to support more important ideas. Learners need to see these relationships and learn how to link ideas. When students use graphics while studying a concept, they build these links.

Visuals provide a wealth of information that both reinforces and supplements text content. The ability to read, interpret, and construct graphic displays is of growing importance in an increasingly visual world as students interact more with computers and electronic texts which often rely heavily on graphic interfaces and graphic aids.

Since visuals are found frequently in all types of expository text materials, and since they provide an abundance of text-related information, the need for instructional activities that help students understand and use them seems clear.

### Protracted language events.

Protracted language events are strategies in which teachers work to maximize verbal activity. In other words, language can be learned through its use. That is, effective second language instruction must be built upon *lengthy* dialogues, referred to in this paper as protracted

language events. This concept is similar to Gallimore and Goldenberg’s (1992) instructional conversations in language learning class.

Role-playing and simulations in class can be an excellent way to engage students. A well-constructed role-playing or simulation exercise can emphasize the real world and require students to become deeply involved in a topic. This teaching strategy would make students learn best when they have ample opportunities to internalize meanings before they have to produce them.

Teacher Talk and Teaching Functions

As used in this study, teaching functions refer to teacher acts in urging the learners to participate in class discussion. The figure below describes the different acts a teacher does in the process of teaching (Bowers, 1980).

Category	Description
Responding	Any act directly sought by the utterance of another speaker, such as answering a question
Sociating	Any act not contributing directly to the teaching/learning task, but rather to the establishment or maintenance of interpersonal relationships.
Organizing	Any act that serves to structure the learning task or environment without contributing to the teaching/learning task itself.
Directing	Any act encouraging nonverbal activity as an integral part of the teaching/learning process.
Presenting	Any act presenting information of direct relevance to the learning task.
Evaluating	Any act that rates another verbal act positively or negatively.
Eliciting	Any act designed to produce a verbal response from another person.

Figure 1. Bowers’ (1980) categories for analyzing classroom interaction

Hughes (1959) described seven categories of teacher-talk: Controlling, imposing, facilitating, developing content, responding, positive affectivity, and negative affectivity.

Controlling empowers the teacher to structure, regulate, set standards, judge, or otherwise control learner behavior.

In imposing, the teacher moralizes, gives help without asking, appraises, and imposes himself into the situation rather than employing a routine. A teacher also checks for information, clarifies procedures and demonstrates procedures when he does facilitating.

Developing content gives authority to the teacher to stimulate, clarify, summarize, evaluate, answer questions, agree or otherwise develop content for learning while responding makes the teacher to clarify learner problems, interpret situations or feelings, and/or respond to learners in terms of content and learner's effort to learn.

In positive affectivity, the teacher encourages, praises, gives recognition, offers solace, or shows positive regard for learners while in negative affectivity, the teacher admonishes, reprimands, accuses, threatens, ignores or shows negative regard for learners.

Brown (1994), on the other hand, gave similar descriptions of teacher-talk but suggests that teacher-talk undergoes through a continuum of directive to non-directive methods: controlling, directing, managing, facilitating and resourcing.

According to Brown, controlling is focused on simply organizing the class hours. e.g. "You have 15 minutes to discuss the problems reflected in the story. After which, five minutes will be given in presenting your output.

Directing is also keeping the process of interaction flowing smoothly and efficiently to bring uniqueness in communicative skills. e.g. In her essay "Three Days to See", Helen Keller enumerated the things she will do in three days while she can see. If you are put in the same situation, where the optometrist tells you that you will only have three days left to use your sight, how will you spend these days?

Managing is simply planning the lessons, modules, activities but allowing each learner to be creative within the parameters set. e.g. Before you defend your propositions in front, submit to me first your written arguments.

In facilitating, the teacher capitalizes on intrinsic motivation allowing students to discover language, by using it pragmatically rather than telling about the language while resourcing implies the students to take initiative to go to the teacher (for advice or counsel)

allowing them to proceed with their own linguistic development.

Brown (1994) claims that the key to interactive teaching is to play toward the non-directive end of the continuum, gradually enabling students to move from their roles of total dependence (upon the teacher, the textbook, etc.) to relatively total independence. The proficiency level of the class will determine to some extent, which roles will dominate. But when at the lowest levels, some interaction can take place and the teacher's role must be one that releases the students to try things for themselves.

### Linguistic Errors and Error Treatment

Error treatment has been very controversial issue in language teaching (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). The way errors are treated differs in approaches and methods of teaching. Learner's age, proficiency level, and goals are some of the examples that determine how a teacher should treat errors. (Brown, 1994). From a teacher's and student's perspectives, there also appear to exist numerous factors involved in this regard. Some teachers might think that correcting errors would lead students to pay more attention to form so that students can gain accuracy to a greater extent in their interlanguage. Others may believe that error treatment should be avoided because of their fear that it will certainly inhibit students from communicating freely.

On the other hand, some students might well be concerned about their linguistic performance in terms of correctness. They may have a preference for feedback from their teachers over no treatment. Other students may place priority on fluency so that teachers' frequent interruption would discourage them to get across what they mean in target language (TL).

Error correction has been treated differently. Celce-Murcia (1991) points out six variables that grammar teaching has to consider: age, proficiency level, educational background, language skills, register, and needs and goals.

Based on the six variables, ESL/EFL instructors would make a decision on the degree to which form is focused with a group of students. Murcia asserted that it would be safe to say that age is an important variable in that whether grammar should be taught

implicitly or explicitly depend on the learner's age.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to determine the teaching strategies that promote communication opportunities of freshman students in the language class at Benguet State University.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### Research Design

This study used descriptive – survey method and language class observation to record and videotape class proceedings to determine the teaching practices and teaching patterns of the English teachers. Four teaching practices from the meta-synthesis of Qualitative Research on Effective Teaching Practices for English Language Learners were observed in the English classes. Bowers' model (1980) was used to determine which teaching functions enhance communication opportunities for students. A questionnaire was administered to determine the students' preference for error correction.

### Locale and Time of the Study

This study was confined to Freshmen English classes at the Department of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences, Benguet State University. Freshmen English classes came from the eight degree programs representing the eight colleges in the university: Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (CA), Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (CAS), Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering (CEAT), Bachelor of Science in Forestry (COF), Bachelor of Science in Home Economics (CHET), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (CN), Bachelor in Secondary Education (CTE) and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) who were enrolled during the school year 2009-2010 at the Benguet State University, La Trinidad, Benguet Philippines.

## Data Collection Instruments

Classroom proceedings of the English teachers were observed and recorded to analyze their teaching practices. The model of Bowers was employed to determine the teaching functions of teachers. A questionnaire on the students' preferred method of correcting their errors was administered to the student – respondents. A five-point scale was used to describe the students' preference in treating their errors: 5 – strongly agree; 4 – moderately agree; 3 – agree; 2 – slightly agree; 1 – do not agree.

## Treatment of Data

Data gathered were summarized, analyzed and cross-tabulated. Summary statistics like weighted means, frequency counts, percentages, ranks and Cochran Q-test were used to analyze the teaching strategies and teaching functions of the English teachers. To analyze the preferred error correction of the students, t-test, frequency and rank were likewise used.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Summary of Teaching Practices by English Teachers

Table 1 shows the teaching practices the English teachers used in the language class. The table illustrates that building on prior knowledge and communitarian teaching practice were predominantly used followed by multiple representations. Protracted learning was the least teaching practice.

The findings reveal that building on prior knowledge is an overall approach to teaching in which teachers work to associate students' lives or experiences to school themes. In almost all lessons, the teachers involved prior knowledge of students before starting the lesson proper and the importance of interaction between the students and the teachers and among the students themselves.

Communitarian teaching is also a manner of instruction built around community while protracted language event is a strategy in

which teachers work to maximize verbal activity. The use of multiple representations is a method designed to support language lessons with objects and indices.

Table 1. Teaching practices used by English teachers

Teaching Practices	n	Percent	Rank
Building on Prior Knowledge	18	100	1.5
Communtarian	18	100	1.5
Multiple Representations	15	83.3	3
Protracted Language	9	50.0	4

$Q_c = 19.059^*$  prob. =  $>0.01$  \*significant

Statistically, the findings of the study reveal that there is a significant difference in the teaching practices the English teachers used. Hence, the hypothesis that there is a difference in the teaching practices the English teachers used is accepted.

The English teachers adopted what is termed as communicative approach to English language teaching following the general trend in the field of second language teaching and learning, moving away from methods that emphasize the memorization of grammatical rules and extensive use of drills and pattern practice and toward methods which emphasize meaningful communication in the second language. Classroom activity is less teacher-dominated but more learner-centered.

The findings strengthen the role of the teachers in the classroom which is more facilitative than directive, allowing students a greater share of the conversational turns than a traditional Initiate – Respond – Evaluate (IRE) interaction pattern.

These findings are in congruence with Widdowson (1978) who distinguishes between expression rules which govern the learner's use of the language and are developed when the learner is engaged in communication and reference rules which represent the learner's knowledge of the system of the second language and are learned in classroom situations where the focus is on correct form.

## Teaching Functions of Teachers

This portion of the study presents the analysis of the teaching functions using Bowers' categories. It points out or identifies the functions of teacher behaviour in the process of teaching. It also determines which of the teaching functions promote communication. Bowers' (1980) teaching categories consist of responding, sociating, organizing, directing, presenting, evaluating, and eliciting.

In summary, the study shows that classroom interaction is dominated by eliciting followed by evaluating and sociating. That is, asking question inside the language class has the bulk of initiating communication between and among the learners and the teachers. At times, most students are passive hence eliciting is indisputably an effective tool to engage them in class discussion. This reflects the relatively high priority of teachers in conducting more language activities and establishing good rapport with the students. Consequently, responding was not used by the teacher since there was no question students asked.

The findings indicate that as teachers evaluate students' performances, they tend to make a move to socialize by praising their performance. This may be considered important in a language classroom to create an environment conducive for learning.

The findings also corroborate with Hughes (1959) who described seven categories of teacher-talk: Controlling, imposing, facilitating, developing content, responding, positive affectivity, and negative affectivity.

Controlling empowers the teacher to structure, regulate, set standards, judge, or otherwise control learner behavior.

In imposing, the teacher moralizes, gives help without asking, appraises, and imposes himself into the situation rather than employing a routine. A teacher also checks for information, clarifies procedures and demonstrates procedures when he does facilitating.

Developing content gives authority to the teacher to stimulate, clarify, summarize, evaluate, answer questions, agree or otherwise develop content for learning while responding makes the teacher to clarify learner problems, interpret situations or feelings, and/or respond to learners in terms of content and learner's effort to learn.

In positive affectivity, the teacher encourages, praises, gives recognition, offers solace, or shows positive regard for learners while in negative affectivity, the teacher admonishes, reprimands, accuses, threatens, ignores or shows negative regard for learners.

### Summary of the Teaching Functions

Table 2 encapsulates the teaching functions used by the teachers in the classroom.

Table 2. Summary of teaching functions using Bowers' categories

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4	Example 5	Example 6
eliciting	eliciting	sociating	eliciting	presenting	eliciting
presenting	sociating	eliciting	directing	directing	presenting
directing	presenting	presenting	presenting	eliciting	organizing
sociating	organizing	organizing	evaluating	organizing	directing
organizing	directing	directing	sociating	evaluating	evaluating
evaluating	evaluating	evaluating		sociating	sociating

While these teaching functions used in the language class are intertwined with each other, eliciting is predominantly the first teaching function employed by the teachers in the class to initiate communication between and among students and the teachers as means of presenting the lesson. On the other hand, evaluating and sociating are also the teaching functions used by the teachers to end their classes. The rest of the teaching functions are interchangeably used in the classroom depending on the classroom lesson and class activities. Responding was not initiated by the teachers because there was no question from the students for the teachers while organizing is not also used by the teacher in example 4. This may be associated to the behavior of the students where they do not generally have the courage to ask questions even they did not understand the lesson. When presenting the lesson, the teacher uses series of questions.

Initially, after presenting the lesson, the teacher directs and organizes the class activities. In general, the last function of the teacher is always evaluating students' activities which are usually followed by sociating. According to Hughes (1959), one of the functions of teacher talk is positive affectivity which means that the teacher praises, gives recognition or shows positive regards for learners' performance.

In summary, there is a pattern the teacher uses in the classroom. The teacher presents the lesson in a series of questions or putting the class in a conducive mood. Then the teacher organizes and directs class activities. In the process of interaction, the teacher evaluates students' activities using positive affectivity. This pattern is in contrary to the traditional classroom interactions of Initiate – Respond – Evaluate (IRE) discourse pattern. (Mehan, 1979). Mehan has described traditional classroom interactions as an Initiate – Respond – Evaluate (IRE) discourse pattern. In this pattern, teachers initiate a discussion topic, most frequently by posing a question, to which students are expected to respond, and teachers then evaluate students' responses.

The IRE pattern has been labelled as "monologic discourse pattern" (Alexander, 2006), in which teachers take turns at will, decide on what topics are important to discuss, decide who will talk and for how long, and interject their responses and interpretations controlling the pace and direction of the discussion. Teachers in traditional discourse patterns dominate classroom discussions, speaking more than fifty percent of the time, control the direction of the discussion by asking particular types of questions, and endorse the responses of particular students that align with what has been predetermined to be important or correct.

### Preferred Error Correction Method of the Learners

This section dealt with the students' preferred method of correcting their errors in the language class. Table 3 reveals the learners' preferred method of correcting their errors in class. The table shows that the students strongly agree for teachers to point out the error and provide the correct form with a mean score of 4.32.

Ranked second is for teachers to explain why the utterance is incorrect with a mean of 4.18 followed by to correct the error immediately (4.02).

The least methods of error correction were to give hint which might enable the student to notice the error and self-correct and present the correct form when repeating all or part of the students' utterance with a mean of 3.92 each. Last in rank is to delay the correction of errors (after class) with 2.19.

Table 3. Students' preferred error correction method

CORRECTION METHOD	XW	DE RANK	T-VALUE	PROB.
T corrects the error immediately	4.02	MA 3	24.843*	<0.5
T delays the correction of errors (after class)	2.19	SA 6	17.216*	<0.05
T gives a hint which might enable S to notice the error and self-correct	3.92	MA 4.5	26.275*	<0.05
T explains why the utterance is incorrect.	4.18	MA 2	31.856*	<0.05
T points out the error and provides the correct form	4.32	MA 1	42.354*	<0.05
T presents the correct form when repeating all or part of the S's utterance.	3.92	MA 4.5	25.415*	<0.05

\*significant

The findings show that when the English teachers give out their feedbacks on errors, they are not judging but supporting their students. This means that when students' errors occur, they can remodel it by saying it correctly, paraphrase it by saying it in different ways, or prepare a grammar lesson at the end of a class for students (Mantello, 1997).

Errors are invariably a demonstration of originality, creativity and intelligence. Errors show that students are motivated to learn new things. Students who commit errors are not only creative; they also demonstrate that they are intelligent learners. Students' errors come from positive and negative transfer from the mother tongue. They come from false analogy and overgeneralization of rules and patterns. They come from attempts to simplify the input to reduce the strain of working memory. In short, errors are the outward manifestation of an

inwardly active mind.

Students' errors are signs of learning and depending on the types of errors and situations, teachers need to offer students the correct ways or usages of the language, and students have the rights to know. Teacher needs to know when, what, and how to correct a student's error, but it is also easy to get carried away and lose the focus.

## CONCLUSIONS

In connection with the findings of this study, the following conclusions were formulated: Teachers use varied teaching practices to provide communication opportunities for students. Teaching functions of teachers follow certain patterns for better comprehension of lessons and to engage the students in class activities/discussion. Treatment of errors in the class is a significant tool for teachers to consider in enhancing communication opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends that: Since building prior knowledge and communitarian teaching practices are commonly used by teachers, the use of multiple representations and protracted language learning should also be utilized by teachers thereby providing students with varied activities to develop with confidence their communication skills. Responding was the least of teachers' functions. In this context, activities/tasks given to the students should be more challenging to encourage students to ask questions that develop their critical thinking and to enhance interaction with the teacher. Teachers should avoid putting answers directly on students' errors, but adopt more implicit error identification techniques for students to reflect on and repair their own errors. Similar research on communication opportunities in the language classroom should be conducted to determine the trend of teaching practices, teaching functions, and students' preferred correction method.

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