A Close Look at the Process of Shaping Students’ Contribution: A Case in a Thai Trainee Teacher’s Classroom

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Abstract – The present study aimed at describing the process of shaping students’ contribution performed by a Thai trainee teacher during her teaching practices. The data were obtained from the teacher-participant’s available recordings. The recordings were analyzed until the selected extracts were found and transcribed. The transcription of the selected extracts was then analyzed using Conversational Analysis (CA) approach through next-turn proof procedure. Following Walsh’s (2006) idea on determining the process of shaping students’ contribution, the study revealed that there are several strategies used by the teacher, such as seeking clarification, scaffolding, modeling (as a part of scaffolding), recast (with repetition and additional information), and noncorrective recast. In other words, the manifestation of shaping students’ contribution mentioned by Walsh (2006) is also found in the present study. The findings of this small-scale study are expected to become a good stepping stone for a better understanding of the process of shaping students’ contribution among Thai teachers in general and trainee teachers, in particular.

Keywords: Shaping students’ contribution, next-turn-proof procedure, shaping strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Ellis (2000:9) in [1] mentions that “Learning arises not through interaction, but in interaction.” For some reasons, this postulate is given a privilege to become the opening remark for the discussion in this paper. Simply speaking, this postulate implies that interaction is indeed very important in the learning process. Whether or not it has been viewed so, research has shown that there has been a growing interest among researchers in investigating classroom interaction, especially second language (L2) classroom interaction (see [2]-[11]-[3], to name but a few).

For the researcher, the idea of researching classroom interaction has been much influenced by the notion of basic sequence organization mentioned by [2], which applies to all L2 classroom interactions. He says that in classroom interaction, there is (always) a pedagogical focus introduced and there are at least to persons (in this case the teacher and students) speak in the L2 in normative orientation to it [2]. They, he added, then analyze the pedagogical focus and perform turns, which display their analysis in relation to it [2]. In other words, the interaction is there, and this interaction (which I termed, ‘in-the-L2’) interaction is playing a significant role in the teaching and learning process.

In some Thai classrooms, however, the existence of ‘in-the-L2’ interaction has been challenged by, I would say, the ‘readiness’ of the students. A study by [5] revealed that Thai students tended to be passive; they do not like to make mistakes and will avoid using English if they think they may use it incorrectly; they tend to be reluctant to give 100% effort in role play or drama exercise; and they are reluctant to talk in front of others in large groups. One conclusion that can be drawn from Weawong’s study [5] is that encouraging Thai students not only to participate or speak, but also ‘interact’ in the class, is such a great challenge for Thai teachers. From the interactionists’ point of view, it is indeed something unfavorable since they believe that conversational interaction help facilitate second language acquisition to take place (Hatch, 1992, Pica, 1994, Long 1983) in [6]. The relationship between second language acquisition and interaction is described clearly by Long (1983) in [6] who mentions that acquisition can be promoted through comprehensible input and the input can be made comprehensible through interactional modification. Thus, the absence of classroom interaction is less likely to bring a good learning process.

However, in the L2 classroom (in a Mathayom-level school in Bangkok), which the present study investigated, the exception of the absence of classroom interaction is found. Based on the researcher’s observation during the trainee teacher’s (teacher-participant’s) teaching practice, it is found that there was indeed an interaction between the teacher and the students, although it did not involve all students. The interaction that the researcher observed focused on the students’ contribution to the teacher’s initiation. Mostly, the students gave contribution in a word-level or a sentence-level to the teacher. The observation reveals that students’ contributions are sometimes not complete or comprehensible
to most students in the class which requires the teacher to ‘shape’ it. This is the starting point of the researcher’s investigation.

From its very basic meaning, “shaping involves taking a learner response and doing something with it rather than simply accepting it” (p.144) [3]. Walsh [1] mentions that “the interactionally competent teacher is able to shape contribution by scaffolding, paraphrasing, reiterating, and so on” (p. 131). In this case, he reminds the teachers of the importance of helping the students to ‘shape’ their input by clarifying it for other students and by scaffolding their contribution. In one of Walsh’s [1] extract, it is found that shaping student’s contribution does not only bring a benefit to those who give it, but also for the rest of the class since it fine tunes their input.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Process of Shaping Students’ Contributions

According to [1], there are some ways in which the teachers can help ‘shape’ learner contributions, such as by (1) seeking clarification (facial expression, single interjections, request for clarification), (2) scaffolding (reformulation, modeling, extension), repairing learner input, and recasting. In one of his extracts, he found that in shaping learner’s contribution, the teacher may not automatically accept the learner’s contribution, but “pushes” (original emphasis, p. 133) the students to give fuller answer with reason [1]. In another occasion, the teacher may paraphrase the learner’s expression by using a language which is, in his term, “more accessible to the rest of the class” (p. 134) [1]. He concludes that most of the time, shaping students’ contribution will serve as a confirmation check for the benefit of the whole class which is considered to be “an essential process to establish and maintain classroom discourse which is meaningful for all participants and to facilitate responses from the rest of the group” (p. 133) [1].

Walsh [1] explicitly mentions that the process of shaping students’ contributions can be done by seeking clarification, scaffolding, modeling, or repairing learner input. In his later publication, Walsh added that the students’ contribution which is in the form of a response can be paraphrased (by using slightly different vocabulary or grammatical structures), summarized or extended, given a scaffold in order to assist the students in saying what they really mean; or alternatively given in the form of a recast (144) [3]. Therefore, in the present study, ‘recast’ is also included as a part of shaping students’ contribution. The definition of ‘recast’ and its types mentioned here, however, is not taken from Walsh alone.

1) Seeking Clarification

In order to seek clarification from the students, the teacher may use ‘uh,’ ‘what,’ or direct questions which “compels the learners to reformulate what they have said” (121) [1]. Long (1983, 1996, in [1] mentioned that the process of seeking clarification is indeed very “relevant to the process of SLA in the L2 classroom since it promotes negotiation for meaning” (121). Ding [7] mentioned that clarification request is used to indicate the “ill-formed” utterance made by the students that requires a repetition or a reformulation. In his study, it is revealed that clarification request can be done by making use of the phrases such as “Pardon me” or repeating the error by asking “What do you mean by X?” Similar to [7], Baleghizadeh & Abdi [8] found in their study that phrases such as “Pardon?” and “I don’t understand” can be used to seek for clarification.

2) Scaffolding

Walsh [1] mentions that “the term scaffolding describes the ways in which teachers provide learners with linguistics ‘props’ to help self-expression” (p.120). He further mentions that there are three phases of scaffolding that may occur in the classroom interaction, namely (1) reformulation, (2) modeling, (3) and extension [1].

- Reformulation is a stage “where a learner’s contribution is reworked using language which is more appropriate” (p.120) [1]. Long (1998) in [9] mentioned that reformulation is a part of recast. In the recast, (Sheen, 2004) in [9] mentions that the reformulation may cover the whole or only some parts of a learner’s incorrect utterance without changing its meaning.

- Modeling is a stage “where a learner’s contribution is simply restated with appropriate pronunciation, stress, or intonation” (p. 120) [1]. In Ellis and Sheen’s study, the term models (which he derived from Long’s study) are mentioned to refer to “exchange-initial utterances that provide learners with positive evidence about the L2 in the form of statements, questions, and instructions that model specific linguistics features” [10].

- Extension is a stage “where an utterance is extended, made more comprehensive, or more comprehensible to the other students” (120) [1].

3) Recast

The term ‘recast’ has been actually acknowledged by [1] as a process, which resembles that of ‘shaping.’ It is a process “where a learner’s contribution is formulated at the level of syntax” (p. 121). The process of (re) formulating learner’s contribution may not only be done by the teacher alone. Ohta (2001) [1] found that “learners also reformulate each other’s contribution as a means of promoting greater clarity and precision of meaning” (121). In other words, recast can be done both by the teacher and the students.

In regard to the research studies on recast in L2, Ellis and Sheen argued that there has been a problem on what they called ‘definitional differences’ (p.4) [10], which makes studies on recast even far more various. Therefore, it should be noted that in the present study, the discussion of the extract on recast is still subject to criticism.
B. Studies on Shaping Students’ Contributions

Research studies, which employ the word ‘shaping’, are so far found in Walsh’s books [1]–[3] and article [4]. The researcher assumes that the scarcity on the research study which cover ‘shaping’ might be because the term ‘shaping’ itself is far too broad to be associated with a single case study with a particular focus. In fact, the term ‘shaping’ covers several sub issues where studies on them have been actually done, such as in the area of scaffolding [11]–[12], and recast [10].

In Thai classroom context, the study, which focuses on how teachers’ shape ‘students’ contributions, is still considered to be rare. The available study, which focuses on one aspect of ‘shaping’, to the best of my knowledge, was conducted by [12] which investigated the use of scaffolding in project work in a Thai university. Other research studies, which may have been done, are still under the researchers’ list of searching.

Considering how important it is to possess the ability of shaping students’ contributions and being triggered by the fact that there is a lack of research study on shaping students’ contributions which involves trainee teachers, the present study was conducted in order to see whether or not a Thai trainee teacher is able to perform shaping students’ contribution and if she is, how it is performed.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main basis of determining the significance of the present study is derived from Walsh’s [1] proposed idea on Classroom Interaction Competence (CIC). Walsh [3] mentioned that CIC has been now widely predicted to be the “fifth skill” (p.143) that should be possessed by the teacher. Among the four features of CIC, the researcher focuses on ‘shaping students’ contribution.’ The present study, which investigates how the Thai trainee teacher helped the students “to say what they mean by using the most appropriate language to do so” (144) [3] is indeed very important, which will become the stepping stone for looking shaping students’ contribution as one feature of CIC in a broader sense among Thai trainee teachers, and language teachers in general in the future.

IV. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As its title suggests, the present study focuses on investigating the process of shaping students’ contribution in a Thai trainee teacher’s classroom, not in another non-Thai and non-trainee teacher’s classroom. The students in the classroom where the teacher teaches should also be taken into consideration. In other words, the teacher may perform differently if she teaches different students in different class which eventually leads into different results. Thus, the limitation has been made clear here that the researcher was investigating this particular classroom interaction, within particular time and circumstance, and under particular teaching purpose. Therefore, generalization can be hardly made in such descriptive study like this. Nonetheless, the present study was investigated from the same point of view mentioned by Walsh [1] in describing the process of shaping students’ (in his term, “learner”) contribution as a part of what he says ‘Classroom Interactional Competence’ (CIC).

As far as the data are concerned, the present study limits its investigation only on ‘in-the-L2 interaction’. Therefore, any process of shaping students’ contribution (if any) that was done in Thai (teacher’s and students’ L1) will not be analyzed. The main consideration of the researcher in limiting the investigation only on ‘in-the L2 interaction’ is not merely because of practicality reason (in which the researcher may find it more difficult to analyze teacher-student interaction than ‘in-the-L2’ teacher-student interaction’). Rather, the consideration is based on the idea of identifying the core institutional goal of L2 classroom interaction mentioned by [2] that is “the teacher will teach the learners the L2” (p.183). From this point of departure, the researcher decided to focus on the interaction where the L2 (in this case English) is used both as “the vehicle and object of interaction” (183) [2].

V. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Participants and Setting

The present study investigates the process of shaping students’ contribution performed by a Thai trainee teacher during her teaching practice in Suankularb Wittayalai School Thonburi, Bangkok. The participants of this study were a female Thai trainee teacher who was teaching English in a class which consists of forty-two students. The teacher-participant was chosen based on a voluntarily basis in which she was asked by the researcher to voluntarily give the recordings of her teaching practice to be analyzed by the researcher and thus ‘indirectly’ becomes the participant of his study.

B. Approach

There are some approaches that have been employed to analyze L2 classroom interaction mentioned by [2] and [1]. Two of them, which are to be the two major approaches to naturally occurring interaction mentioned by Levinson (1983:286) in [1] are Discourse Analysis (DA) approach and Conversation Analysis (CA) approach. In the present study, the approach that is used to analyze the classroom interaction is Conversation Analysis (CA). The idea of using CA approach has been much encouraged by Heritage’s (1997: 162) postulate in [1] which mentions that interaction is both context-shaped and context-renewing in which ‘one contribution is dependent on a previous one and subsequent contributions create a new context for later actions” (p.50).

In relation to the students’ contribution that the present study investigated, Seedhouse [2] in his ‘second principle of CA’ explains clearly why contributions are context-shaped and context-renewing. He said that they are context-shaped because “they cannot be adequately
understood except by the reference to the sequential environment in which they occur and which the participants design them to occur” (p.14) and they are context-renewing because “they inevitably form part of the sequential environment in which a next contribution will occur” (p.14) [2].

In order to understand how the interactants interpret the message in the interaction, the researcher analyzes the sequence organization of the interaction by employing next-turn proof procedure, which was introduced by Sacks at al. in [2]. By using this procedure, the explanation of ‘who doing or saying what (to whom) and why’ can be relatively easy to obtain.

C. Instrument

Since the researcher obtained the data from voluntarily basis (in which he asked the teacher-participant to give her recordings to be analyzed), there is no such instrument utilized by the researcher in the present study. However, earlier, the data themselves were gathered through video-recording via webcam device of a personal computer with a good audio-visual quality.

D. Procedure of Data Collection

At first, the researcher asked the permission of the teacher-participant to voluntarily give her recordings during the teaching practice to the researcher. Once the permission was obtained, the researcher then started working with the recordings. He listened to all recordings, selected the extracts where ‘in-the-L2’ interaction takes place, and transcribed those selected extracts to be further analyzed.

E. Data

As far as the data of the present study are concerned, it should be noted that the researcher did not transcribe all recordings. Instead, after listening to all of them, he decided to choose the recordings that reveal interesting facts about ‘shaping’ students’ contribution. Once the expected extracts were found, he transcribed that part only and then analyzed them. The selection of the extracts was done by looking at the ‘next turn proof procedure’ in relation to the process of shaping students’ contribution mentioned by [1].

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Using the next-turn-proof procedure as the basis of analysis and Walsh’s [1] idea on shaping, the study has successfully revealed the process of shaping students’ contribution performed by a Thai trainee teacher during her teaching practice. It is revealed that the teacher used several strategies of shaping students’ contribution namely (1) seeking clarification, (2) scaffolding, (3) modeling (which is a part of scaffolding), (4) repetition to show uncertainty (in order to open room for more contribution), and (5) noncorrective recast.

1) Seeking Clarification

In the extract below, the students were asked to ‘construct’ a sentence from a given word in a piece of paper to each group. One group got words about ‘subject, while the other groups were given words about ‘verb,’ ‘object,’ and ‘adverb.’ The fact is that, the students did not really ‘contribute’ in a way that they did not express their own ideas or opinions. Rather, they just read what is written in the paper. Nonetheless, the shaping is there as what is shown by the extract below.

Extract 1:

T: Object....object....object, Ti nai? (1)
S1: A dog. (2)
S2: Your friend's name. (3)
T: Who your friend’s name? You have to choose your friend name. (4)
S1: Boss. (5)
T: Together, louder, 123. (6)
Ss: Boss. (7)
T: Boss (8)
T: Object is Boss, with capital. (9)

In the above extract, it can be seen that the first contribution from one student was not accepted by the teacher (line 2). She accepted the second contribution from another student (S2), which was read from a piece of paper from the ‘object’ group. In relation to this extract, I should say that the researcher may not be able to “gain a direct window into..........their cognitive state” (p. 21) [2], but, whether it is by chance or in purpose, choosing the second contribution and seeking clarification for it has allowed the teacher to expand the discourse and do shaping. Here, the teacher is not only asking for clarification to the students, but also expanding the student’s answer (line 4). It is seeking clarification in a way that the teacher wants the students to ‘clarify’ who is that ‘friend’. The process of seeking clarification was done by using Wh-question (who). At the same time, it is expanding the student’s answer since the student’s answer was read from what was given by the teacher. In this case, the teacher would like the student to think more by providing an exact and a real answer (the name of one of her friends in the class). Thus, the shaping does not only make the student’s contribution clearer to the eyes or understanding of the teacher and the other students, but it has also allowed the teacher to move the process of interaction forward, which only then allows her to continue the lesson.

Another interesting fact from the above extract is that, the teacher makes use of a choral response to seek for clarification. The same phenomenon has also been revealed in Walsh’s [4] study in which a teacher marks her instruction and signposts that she wants the whole class to respond by saying the word ‘together.’ According to [4], “this is a useful strategy in a multi-party conversation like a classroom where calling out and ‘ragged’ choral repetitions are very common” (p. 8). In the above extract, the teacher even used the word
‘together,’ ‘louder,’ and ‘1,2,3’ which all signal that the teacher expects ‘classroom contribution,’ not only ‘individual contribution’. So, it appears that individual shaping that the teacher (actually) gave to one student, has turned out into something else, as if the contribution was given by the whole students in the class.

It should be noted that the teacher does not only use the word ‘together,’ ‘louder,’ and ‘1,2,3’ to trigger response or contribution, but also to repeat and echo it through the students’ mouth. Walsh [4] has mentioned two types of echoing, namely (1) teacher-learner echo, “where the teacher repeats a learner utterance for the benefit of the class” (p. 9), and (2) Teacher-teacher echo, “where a teacher simply repeats her on utterance almost like a kind of habit” (p. 9). In this extract, instead of the teacher herself echoing the student’s answer, she would like the whole class to do so through, in my newly introduced term in this study, ‘learner-learner echo,’ where the students are asked to repeat the contribution of the other students.

2) Scaffolding

Walsh [1] mentions “the term scaffolding describes the ways in which teachers provide students with linguistic ‘props’ to help self-expression” (p. 120). The following extract shows how scaffolding is done.

Extract 2:

T: Adverb, who’s that adverb? Adverb? Earth.....Earth, adverb luk-luk (Thai word to address younger person). What did your group choose?(1)

S: Very much. (2)

T: I don’t sure that your friends agree with that. (3)

S: Quickly....quickly.... (4)

T: Quickly. Can you read together? (5)

T: Mony.... (6)

S: Mony love Boss.....quickly (unclear) (7)

T: love Boss quickly. And you will end up quickly, right? (8)

In the above extract, the teacher provided a scaffold at the very beginning. The scaffold helps the students produce the desired sentence. However, at the end of the sentence, the students’ response was somewhat unclear. Again, the teacher provides a scaffold for the student in which the phrases ‘love Boss quickly’ is given to the students. The main problem lied on the unclarity of the student in saying the word ‘quickly’, which implies that they were not very sure with their answer. Since it is a choral answer, the shaping is done in order to make the whole class get a clear understanding. What is unique in this extract is that the scaffold was given both at the very beginning of the sentence (to help learners construct the utterance) and at the end of the sentence (to help learners finish the utterance).

3) Modeling

According to [1], there is a type of scaffolding called ‘modeling’. In the present study, ‘modeling,’ which focuses on student’s mispronunciation, is also found. The following extract shows how the teacher gave a model to the learner’s mispronounced word.

Extract 3:

T: Every question na ka. So B is two, right? Mah, then you calculate for me. What is the total is? (1)

S: Five. (2)

T: Six. This one I got 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.....I got six. (3)

S: I got sick. (4)

T: I got six. This is six na ka. Six. Calculate for me then we will see what kind of person you are. (5)

From the recording, it is heard that one student said ‘I got sick’ [silK] (line 4) when he tried to imitate the teacher’s utterance ‘I got six’ [slks] (line 3). Once the teacher heard the student’s mispronunciation, she did a correction. The correction, however, did not directly address to that particular student. Rather, she just restated her very same utterance (I got six), and then re-emphasize that utterance as well as announcing it to the whole class by saying ‘This is six na ka’ (line 5). She highlights the point where the mistake has been committed by the student, that is on the word ‘six.’

4) Recast (with repetition and additional information)

This process is shown in the extract below:

Extract 4:

T: How many country in here talking about the birthday? How many country? (1)

S: May be five. (2)

T: Maybe five? May be six. So I give you five minutes to read it one more time. Make sure you get. (3)

S: Japan. (4)

T: Oh Japan. So make sure you with your reading right now. I give you five minutes to read. (5)

In the above extract, the teacher is in the state of being neutral in showing her response to the students’ answer. Neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ answer was given. Rather, she took the middle ground by using the word ‘maybe.’ In this form of shaping, the teacher did not simply repeat the student’s wording (2), but also as an uncertain answer or response which enables her to add the word ‘maybe’ (which apparently appears to be the clue). As far as the literal meaning of the word ‘maybe’ is concerned, it is understood that such word is “used to show that something is possible or that something might be true” (CALD 3rd edition definition) [13]. In other words, the answer is not certain yet. In fact, from the next-turn proof procedure analysis, the teacher simply means that ‘It is not five, but six’. This is an elegant way of saving learner’s face who gave the contribution by not directly saying that his contribution was wrong or not accepted. The teacher in this case, left two main clues that lead the students to the expected answer. Firstly, she did not directly accept the student’s
contribution (but she did repeat it with raising intonation). Secondly, the teacher gave one more clue (additional information) in which they had to read one more time and make sure that they get the answer. So, it almost looks like ‘incorporated interrogative recasts’ mention by Lyster, that is a reformulation in an utterance with rising information [intonation] and additional information” [10].

What happens next is whether or not the students understood that the shaping implied something which requires them to contribute another (and the expected) answer. This state is called ‘noticing the gap’ [9]. Larsen-Freeman (2003) in [9] mentions that “Of course no technique... is effective unless the student can perceive the difference between the recast and what he or she has just said (p. 136)”. This, noticing the gap between what the students were saying and what is considered to be correct (target-like version) is very important [9]. Although the researcher may not be able to “gain a direct window into...............their cognitive state” (p. 21) [2], the next-turn proof procedure shows that one student could get the meaning of the word ‘maybe five maybe six’ (which signals that the two answers have a possibility to be true). Thus, he said ‘six’ which was the expected answer. According to the researcher’s observation, it is revealed that they are six countries mentioned in the book.

5) Non-corrective Recast

The present study also revealed a strategy of what is called by [10] as ‘noncorrective recast,’ that is “a recast that does not correct a target but models a target” (p.5). The following extract shows how noncorrective recast is performed.

Extract 5:
T: Object? What is your object? 123 (1)
S: A dog eats a buffalo. (2)
T: A buffalo. (3)

The extract above shows that it is, more or less, the opposite phenomena of extending learning’s contribution mentioned by [1]. In a certain situation, the teacher may use ‘extension’ strategy [1] in shaping learner’s contribution. However, the above extract shows that it is not always the case. Clearly, the expected answer is ‘buffalo’ – a very short response – since the teacher’s question has been made very clear ‘What is your object?’ The student, however, overdid his response by giving the teacher a full sentence (which supposed to be mentioned by the teacher as a conclusion). To some extent, there is nothing wrong with the student’s response. As a matter of fact, the teacher did not say any negative feedback to such response. The only thing she did was to reduce the student’s contributed sentence in order to maintain the pattern of a so-called expected (and correct) answer from the students. The teacher, in this case, shows to the student (s) that what is expected is only one word, not more. She, therefore, cut out the rest of the, in my term, ‘unnecessary contribution (and that what is supposed to be understood as ‘object’ of the sentence by the rest of the students). In other words, the teacher does not want to confuse the other students. However, the bottom line of mentioning this extract under the term ‘noncorrective recast’ is that instead of explicitly correcting the student’s contribution (e.g. by giving negative feedback to the student), the teacher ‘models’ the target by directly saying ‘the object’ word.

VII. CONCLUSION

This small-scale study has revealed that the Thai trainee teacher whose teaching has been observed has been able to perform the process of shaping students’ contribution. From the findings, it can be seen that the shaping process has enabled the teacher to make the students’ contribution more comprehensible to the other students. It should be noted that the researcher just discussed the selected extracts from the teacher-participant’s recordings. Therefore, another form of shaping students’ contribution which particularly appears in Thai classroom context, is still under investigation.

It is hoped that this study will give a better understanding on the importance of shaping students’ contribution in learning process. However, it should be noted that the present study is just a small scale study which involves only one trainee teacher, from a particular non-English speaking country (Thailand), who is teaching in a particular classroom with particular students, under particular circumstance. Therefore, the claim that the (Thai) trainee teacher is also able to perform shaping students’ contribution is true just within itself. Another study should be conducted, especially among trainee teachers which is significant for the study of teacher development in the future.

REFERENCES


