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# Chapter 22

## Classroom Language

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# Introduction

Language is a means of communication which may take an oral or a written form. We communicate for various reasons: to exchange ideas, express feelings or manage something. Pupils in Egypt learn English as a foreign language. English is used within the limits of the classroom only. Primary school pupils are exposed to English for only 135 minutes a week, and that is if the teacher uses English all the time in class. For this reason, it is very important for both teacher and pupils to understand from the very beginning that they have to use English in class to communicate.

## What Do We Mean by Classroom Language?

By classroom language, we mean the language used by teachers to communicate with their pupils. It is the language which can be used to give instructions, to check attendance, to correct a mistake, to praise pupils, to ask a question, to explain a vocabulary item or a structure.

## Is Classroom Language always Verbal?

Classroom language is not always verbal. Especially with a class of beginners, classroom language need not be solely verbal. A lot of non-verbal interaction takes place inside the classroom. Non-verbal communication can save class time and help the teacher to avoid using Arabic. Gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice are all part of the classroom language. For example, "*I don't know*" can be signaled by shrugging the shoulders; a hand cupping the ear can be a signal for "*Please repeat.*" The teacher can also use gestures for the following expressions: *be quiet, listen, repeat, continue, stop, come to the board, stand up, sit down, repeat all class, repeat half class, past tense* (point thumb backwards over shoulder), *present tense* (point down), *future tense* (point forward), *face each other* (point two fingers towards each other) (CDELTA, 1990).



A method that makes use of non-verbal interaction is Asher's *Total Physical Response* (TPR). This method is very suitable for teaching beginners if the teacher wants to avoid the use of Arabic. The method consists basically of having learners carry out verbal commands given by the teacher or a pupil. (A game that makes use of TPR and teaches instructions is, "The Teacher Says," in *Hello! 1* - Unit 7.)

## Does Classroom Language Refer Exclusively to the Language Used by the Teacher?

No, it is useful for children also to learn some common expressions to use in the class. You can introduce these one at a time and then put them up on

posters around the wall to remind your class of them. Below are some useful sentences you may wish to teach

Can you lend me a pen / pencil?  
Sorry I forgot my book / pen / copybook.  
Sorry I'm late.  
I don't understand.  
Can you help me?  
May I go out?  
Again please.  
How do you say "---" in English?  
How do you spell that?  
Thank you / You're welcome  
Excuse me, Mr. --- I can't hear you.

- Teach the above expressions one at a time.
- Encourage students to use the appropriate sentence when the need arises.
- Write them on a wall chart and hang in a place seen by all.
- When your students use Arabic remind them of the English by pointing to the wall chart.

## The Value of Using English in Class

Even with a class of beginners starting their first English lesson, it is possible to teach entirely in English. The teacher has to explain to pupils in Arabic the value of learning English and using English in class. The teacher, however, should not force pupils to speak the language before they are ready for it (Krashen, 1982). It is more useful to persuade and convince pupils to use English in class than force them to use it without real understanding (Doff 1995).

Using English most of the time helps pupils to practice the language through listening and responding to spoken English. Classroom language will help pupils pick up words and expressions that are beyond those in their books which will eventually enlarge their vocabulary. Also, using English to say and do real things in class gives the pupils the feeling that English is a real language that is used for communication, not only for tests (Doff 1995). But the question is: can a teacher who is not very proficient in the language use English most of the time? Following are some reasons teachers state for not using English to teach all the time.

- Teachers are not competent enough to use English all the time in class.
- Some pupils have very low competence in English and it takes them a long

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time to use English only.

- Pupils always ask for Arabic explanations for the vocabulary items and structures taught.
- Some supervisors urge teachers to use Arabic side by side with English.
- Many pupils become frustrated when they don't understand English in class.
- Sometimes pupils misunderstand English instructions while being tested (El Araby, 1999).

In answer to teachers' worries mentioned above, we state the following:

- To use English in a primary classroom, teachers do not need to be very competent in the language. All they need to master is basic classroom English and the language items they are going to introduce in a certain lesson. They can achieve this by very good preparation, and, hopefully, by using the book you are reading now which lists such basic classroom expressions.
- We cannot decide that we will use Arabic because pupils are not competent. If we continue using Arabic, they will never improve. We cannot teach English through Arabic. Even if we wait for a pupil for some time to answer, this "wait time" is also useful for other pupils to think of the answer and figure it out.
- If we as teachers help pupils to understand us in English by using the several devices mentioned before, e.g., mimes, gestures. They will not ask for Arabic translation.
- If supervisors see a successful class conducted in English, they will never ask teachers to use Arabic.
- Teachers can give simple, short instructions and demonstrate them. They can make sure that pupils understand if pupils carry out their instructions. For example, if the teacher says: "*Please close your books,*" this should be illustrated by the teacher holding a book and closing it. Teachers should also encourage those who carry out the instructions, and encourage the others to do the same (Willis, 1981).
- If the teacher uses English in class as much as possible, pupils will never misunderstand test instructions. In fact, teachers resort to Arabic translation because it is often easier for them, not because it is better for the students.

## Should Arabic be Banned?

Arabic cannot be completely banned from the classroom, but it has to be used sparingly. Arabic can be used sometimes to explain the procedure for a complicated activity, to give the background when explaining a structure

or to check the comprehension of an abstract vocabulary item. Teachers have to bear in mind that the more English pupils listen to and use, the more they learn. They have to train themselves to minimize their talking time in Arabic as much as possible. They have to remember that they are not in class to fill up the time with the sound of their own voice, but to arrange matters so that their pupils do most of the talking in English. Teachers should give more time for their pupils to use the language to communicate with each other. Teachers should also use English classroom language as much as possible.

The pages at the end of this chapter are photocopiable resources. Teachers are encouraged to use these sheets for three purposes: as a reference while planning teaching, as a reference while teaching in the classroom, and as a study guide to improve their classroom language vocabularies.

## A Sample Lesson

So how can a teacher give simple instructions and use simple English? Let us take a sample unit from *Hello!* and look at the language we might use.

### Basic Classroom English Lesson

Based on *Hello! 1* Unit 19

Exercise (B) Listen and Number p. 17

Possible classroom language:

*T: Look at exercise "B". How many words are there/can you see?*

*Ss: Six words.*

*T: Very good. Who can read them?*

Student reads.

*T: Thank you, Salma.*

*Now, be quiet and listen carefully. Use gesture.*

*I am going to play the cassette. Number the words as you hear them. I want you to listen first. Then, I'll play it a second time and you write your answers.*

*Ready? Let's begin now.*

Remember:

- Use gestures when needed to make it easier for your students to understand your instructions.
- You can ask students to repeat your instructions to check for understanding.

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE TERMS and EXPRESSIONS

Instructions:

Stand up.  
 Sit down/Be seated.  
 Get into pairs.  
 Get into teams of 4 or 5.  
 Move your chairs making groups of 4.  
 Go back to your seats.  
 All of you repeat after me.  
 Open your textbooks to page ~.  
 Turn to page ~.  
 I'd like this half of the class to ask, the other half answers.  
 Close your books / notebooks.  
 Come to the front / blackboard.  
 Write the answer in your notebooks.  
 Check your partner's answers.  
 Read page (~) aloud.  
 Listen to the tape then answer the question.  
 Copy this into your notebooks.  
 Ask your partners the following questions.  
 Answer your partner's questions.  
 Pass your workbooks to me.  
 Turn right / left / round  
 Write the answer

Disciplinary Expressions:

Be quiet.  
 Stop talking.  
 Calm down.  
 Pay attention.  
 Don't do that.  
 Stop that / stop it.  
 Put that away.  
 Don't do that until I tell you.  
 Behave yourself / yourselves.  
 Come on, let's get on.  
 Raise your hand if you want something. Don't talk until I tell you.

Revising previously covered material:

Let's go over it again.  
 Who can remember what we did yesterday? What about doing it again?  
 Can anybody tell me what we talked about? Let's remember what we did.  
 Let's summarize the main points.

Talking about the lesson:

Now we are going to ~  
 Later on we will ~  
 At the end of the lesson, you will ~  
 Our lesson today is about ~

Introducing a new stage in the lesson

Let's do ~  
 Now we will read the story.  
 O.K. Let's do something different.  
 Ready? It's time to ~  
 Shall we move on to write the ~?

<b>CLASSROOM LANGUAGE</b> <b>TERMS and EXPRESSIONS continued</b>	
<p>Giving homework and finishing the lesson</p> <p>I think we'll stop here.</p> <p>I want you to ~ at home.</p> <p>I want this ~ tomorrow morning.</p> <p>Can you do it on your own?</p> <p>Collect the papers for me, please.</p> <p>Do you have any questions about homework?</p>	<p>Praising and giving feedback</p> <p>Good / Very good / Excellent / Well done.</p> <p>You are good boys / girls / pupils Wonderful.</p> <p>Clap for him / her / That's great</p> <p>Come on, you can do it.</p>
<p>Using Visual Aids</p> <p>Could you help me hang this wall chart up?</p> <p>Who will clean the board?</p> <p>Let's stick the cards here.</p> <p>Pass me the pictures over there, please. Hold the pins for me, please.</p> <p>Can anyone take the poster down?</p> <p>Please, help me arrange the cards in the folder. Can you plug the tape recorder in for me, please?</p>	<p>Questions:</p> <p>Who knows the answer?</p> <p>Who will do it?</p> <p>What's ~ in English?</p> <p>How do you spell that?</p> <p>What's ~ in Arabic?</p> <p>Do you have any questions?</p> <p>What's the answer?</p> <p>(adapted from Willis, 1981).</p>

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## Conclusion

Classroom language is very important for teaching English as a foreign language at the primary school in Egypt. It is considered a key factor in helping pupils to get the feeling that learning English is not memorizing words and structures just for the sake of the exam. If we teach them the kind of language that they use naturally to communicate with people inside and outside the classroom, they will understand that language is a tool for communication. The better they understand classroom language, the better pupils will learn it and like it.

The best way to teach Classroom Language is by using it naturally and regularly even if the pupils seem discouraged at the beginning. To motivate the pupils to use classroom language, the teacher can adapt the expressions mentioned in the chapter to suit his or her own situation. Teachers can also use TPR and games like "The teacher says," to arouse pupil's interest to learn and use classroom language.

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## Understanding Check

1. Review Instructions. With a partner discuss the different ways the teacher can use English only to help pupils understand the following instructions:

*Stand up, please.*

*Sit down, please.*

*Quiet please, ssh!*

*Listen.*

*Listen and repeat.*

*Yes.*

*No.*

*Everybody.*

*Work in pairs.*

2. Record and Observe Yourself. Bring a small tape recorder to class, place it on a table, and record yourself teaching in the classroom. (Use batteries to work it if you have no electricity in your classroom). Go home and review the tape. You can do some of the following:
  - Review when you used English and when you used Arabic and for what purpose.
  - Could you have used English more?
  - Write down the instructions for the activities and reflect how well your pupils understood them.
  - If pupils did not respond to your instructions, think of what was wrong

with these instructions and try to think of ways you could've given simpler and shorter ones.

- Focus on another aspect of your classroom language e.g. how you explained vocabulary and what language you used

If you reflect on your teaching in this way, you will be astonished at the fast development of your teaching competencies.

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## Resources

Asher, J. J. (1981). *The Total Physical Response (TPR): Theory and practice*. In H. Wintz (Ed.) *Native and Foreign Language Acquisition*. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences.

Egyptian University Professors (1990). *Methodology Materials for Fourth Year*. Cairo: Center for Developing English Language Teaching.

Doff, A. (1995). *Teach English: A Training Course for Teachers*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

El. Araby, S. (1999). *English Teaching Strategies: Teacher Development Program for Non-specialist Teachers*. Cairo: Ministry of Education.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Pergamon Press Inc.

Willis, J. (1981). *Teaching English through English*. London, UK: Longman Group Limited.

## Web Resources

<http://www.churchillhouse.com/english/classlang.html>

This page has a downloadable handout which can be given to students containing the most common classroom expressions.

[http://www.uaepages.com/leo/classroom\\_language1.htm](http://www.uaepages.com/leo/classroom_language1.htm)

A list of classroom expressions from a contributor in the Arab World.

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## Summary Handout for Chapter 22:

### Classroom Language

What is classroom language?

- Classroom language is the language used by the teacher to organize and manage learning and to socialize with learners.
- It can be both verbal and non-verbal.

Why should teachers try to use English classroom language?

- Using English classroom language maximizes children's exposure to English.
- English cannot be taught through Arabic although there are occasions when we might wish to use Arabic in the classroom.

What are suggestions for using classroom language?

- Teachers do not have to have an advanced level of English to use English in the classroom. They need to learn key phrases and teach these to the pupils.
- Do not be discouraged if at first the children find it difficult to understand. Use gestures to make your meaning clear and gradually build up the amount of English you use in class.

