Teacher Talk: Presentation Skills for Teachers

with Kevin McCaughey

Live from the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa

Office of English Language Programs
U.S. Department of State
Why this topic?

Hmm... why is teacher talk important?
“[I]t is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living.”

—Plato, Apology 38a.
Contents

1 Teacher Talk Time
   • How much do we talk in class?
   • How much should we refrain from talking?

2 Unfortunate Teacher Talk Types
   • A humorous(?) look at avoidable things we say and do in front of a class

3 Student Talk and Presentations
   • Tips for organizing students
Part 1
Teacher Talk Time
“People think that I talk more than I actually do.”

— Kevin’s friend
How much do you talk in class?

A lot!
Me, too!

Take Poll 3
Teacher Talk Time (TTT) is a concern!

Chat: When is teacher talk time necessary and helpful to your students?
Not all TTT is bad

- Are your learners young enough that you don’t demand **output**?
- Are you telling stories, providing comprehensible input?
- Does your teacher talk consist of prompts which generate student talk?
- Are you a lecturer who is expected to talk for the entire class?
“Teachers of English in many countries are now being trained to give more attention to the development of speaking skills in their learners… [S]poken language is seen as such a vital tool in modern communication.”

— Rod Bolitho (2006)

“Teacher Talk and Learner Talk”

Not all STT is good

- Sometimes student speaking is rote memorization or responses that involve little **thinking**

- Unless group or pair work is involved, students get little practice
TTT and STT
TTT and STT
Then there’s TWT…

**Chat:** What does the abbreviation **TWT** mean?
Teacher Wait Time

The amount of time a teacher waits after asking students a question
Teacher Wait Time

How long do you wait?

Take Poll 4
Teacher Wait Time

The typical teacher waits less than one second!

— Mary Budd Rowe (1986)
“Wait Time: Slowing Down May Be a Way of Speeding Up”

*Questioning Skills for Teachers. What Research Says to the Teacher*
Part 2

8 Unfortunate Teacher Talk Types
This teacher is guilty on all counts!

Sentence Finisher

Self-Answerer

Over-Explainer

Interrupter

Speed Talker

Pause Eater

Commentator

Excuse Maker

Kevin
Teacher: What did you do yesterday?

Student: It was a nice day, so with my friends we went to... uh...

Teacher: To the park?

Student: Uhh... yes.
#1 The Sentence Finisher

*Or just reading aloud:*

**Teacher:** Carlos, please read sentence 5.

**Carlos:** “The young man goes to bed…”

**Teacher:** “at midnight.” Marike, read the next sentence.
#1 The Sentence Finisher

Take Poll 5
Is it okay to interrupt a student who is speaking?

When?

Take Poll 6
Video clip from *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*

Paramount Pictures (1987)

Can you identify the Unfortunate Talk Type?
#3 The Self-Answerer!
Thinking Back…

Take Poll 7
Do you talk too fast?

If so, why do you think you do?

Share your ideas in the chat box.
#5 The Pause Eater

Compare:

“It was the best of times it was the worst of times.”

“It was the best of times, (1 second pause) it was the worst of times.”

— Charles Dickens
A Tale of Two Cities
That’s a shame because a pause...

- allows you to vary pace, like any good piece of writing, music, or film does

- allows you to assess the level of comprehension or the mood in a room
Take the Pause Challenge

Experiment next time you’re in class.
Pause between your thoughts or sentences.

Try one second.
Try three seconds.
Try five seconds!
Can you do 10?
Teacher: So, I would like to write a question on the board, asking you what you did over the weekend. I’m just going to grab the chalk, which is on my desk. There it is. I’ve got it. And... give me just a moment while I write this on the board for you. “What... did... you...
#7 The Over-Explainer
Sample Dialogue

Teacher begins class by telling about what’s happening at his home.

Is that the present perfect in that sentence?

As a matter of fact, yes. Because my dog was sick yesterday and the day before, and he was still sick this morning.

Remember, we use the present perfect, among other things, to show that an action started at some point in the past and continues until now.

Or we use the present perfect to show something that has just happened. For instance, “The Prime Minister has just given a speech.”
A Good Explanation?

Type why or why not in the chat box.

My dog has been sick.
Kevin’s response

Is that the present perfect in that sentence?

Yes, it is.

My dog has been sick.
Why I keep it short

- I try to answer *precisely* what a student asks

- The topic may be of vital interest to the student asking the question, but of *no interest* to the rest of the class

- I can *pause* after the short answer to see if the class is satisfied or has another question
Why I keep it short

I don’t want to dominate the class with my words.

I’m aware that sometimes I try to look smart in front of students, but that doesn’t benefit them, so I avoid that.

I know I can later design an activity where students may explore, say, the present perfect.
Pause and think:

Can you explain when to use *in*, *on*, and *at* for certain places?

WOW!

That is difficult!
What can you do instead of explain?
Ask groups of students to make 5-10 sample sentences

facebook.com/AmericanEnglishatState/
#8 The Excuse Maker
MORNING, CLASS
WELL, CLASS. I SPENT A LONG TIME PREPARING A REALLY GREAT HANDOUT FOR YOU...
AMAZING GREAT HANDOUT!
ENGLISH

...FOR A REALLY COOL ACTIVITY.
THE COPY MACHINE WASN’T WORKING.
SO I GUESS WE CAN'T DO THAT ACTIVITY...
...that I really wanted to do.
ENGLISH

THAT STINKS.

TRANSLATION = THAT'S BAD
LATER, JAVVY REFLECTS...
I shouldn't make excuses to the class...

Even if I want them to know what tough luck I'm having...
...AND HOW HARD I WORK.
BECAUSE EXPLAINING MY PROBLEMS, WELL, HOW DOES THAT HELP THEM LEARN?
I GUESS WE TEACHERS SHOULD ALWAYS ASK OURSELVES IF WHAT WE'RE SAYING BENEFITS OUR STUDENTS. AND HOW.
The End
Part 3
Student Talk and Presentations
Speaking Task
Students talk in groups **without** advance preparation

Presentation
Students are asked to **prepare** to speak on a topic
Should students give presentations in English?

Take Poll 8
What are advantages and disadvantages of student presentations?
Advantages of Student Presentations

Preparing involves multiple skills:

- Thinking
- Organization
- Research
- Reading
- Writing and note-taking
- Speaking practice
Disadvantages of Student Presentations

- Can cause students stress
- Does not reflect how students will often use their speaking skills in life
- If one student presents and the rest of class listens, we are not increasing STT
- Often students just read their presentation
- Poor use of class time: e.g., 30 students with 5-minute presentations = 2.5 hours
Use Group Format for Presentations

class of 30 students

3-minute presentations

= presenters
Use Group Format for Presentations

class of 30 students → 3-minute presentations

= presenters

presenters rotate, repeating presentation
Consider Video Presentations

- Students record a 1-minute presentation using a phone’s video camera
- Upload it to internet
- Other students watch *at home*
- Audience students write a brief response or record a brief audio/video response
Take the Teacher Talk Type Video Challenge

- Enlist a teacher friend
- Your friend films your lesson
- Do you see any Unfortunate Teacher Talk Types?
- What is good? What can you improve on?
- Are you taking advantage of pauses?
Take the Stopwatch Challenge

- Record one lesson (audio or video)
- Later, use a stopwatch to precisely time:
  - How much you talk
  - How much students talk
  - How long it takes to explain things
  - …and more!
“While analyzing my taped lessons many questions arose. First, I could not account for 12 minutes of my lesson. They got wasted. Where do I waste my lesson time and how can I use my lesson time more efficiently?”

— Albina Krasnova, 2011

“Establishing Rapport with Your Students”
http://www.hltmag.co.uk/aug11/sart08.htm
The Unexamined Life

We spend a lot of time examining our students' English skills and progress

It’s so easy to forget about ourselves!

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”
— Plato
Awareness Outcomes?

1 Teacher Talk Time
   • Do you have new insight into how much you talk in class, when, and why?

2 Unfortunate Teacher Talk Types
   • Have you increased awareness of these habits in a useful way?

3 Student Talk and Presentations
   • Will you try presentations in small groups?

Take Poll 9
Teacher Talk:
Presentation Skills for Teachers

I look forward to seeing you on the Ning!
Like: facebook.com/RELOSouthernAfrica/

Except where otherwise noted, images are the presenter’s own or from clcker.com and pixbay.com (open source, public domain)