

# Teaching English as A Foreign Language: Making Use of Spontaneous Language

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**Abstract:** Although the importance of teaching and learning English has been widely recognized, many still do not know the best way to optimize the students' ability in EFL learning. This article attempts to explore effective ways of teaching English by reviewing an article by Illès and Akcan. Involving 25 pre-service English teachers in Turkey and nine in Hungary, the researchers recorded their classrooms' condition and conducted semi-controlled interviews with the teachers to investigate the use of real-life language in their classrooms. It was revealed that the use of real life language in EFL classrooms was beneficial to optimize students ability in EFL learning. In addition, facilitating the use of spontaneous language, providing authentic materials and real-life context, and creating learner-centered process of learning in the classrooms also affirmed the optimization.

**Key Words:** english teaching pedagogy, spontaneous language, authentic teaching, traditional way of teaching

**Abstrak:** Meskipun pentingnya pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris telah dikenal secara luas, dan banyak yang belum memahami cara terbaik untuk mengoptimalkan kemampuan siswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris. Artikel ini menguraikan cara-cara efektif dalam mengajar bahasa Inggris dengan menelaah artikel oleh Illès dan Akcan. Melibatkan 25 calon guru Bahasa Inggris di Turki dan sembilan di Hongaria, peneliti merekam situasi kelas dan melakukan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap mereka. Telaah ini menemukan bahwa penggunaan bahasa yang digunakan secara alami di kelas pembelajaran bahasa Inggris bermanfaat untuk mengoptimalkan kemampuan siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, memfasilitasi penggunaan bahasa secara spontan, menyiapkan materi otentik dan terkait konteks kehidupan nyata, serta menciptakan proses pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa juga membantu optimalisasi itu.

**Kata kunci:** pedagogi pengajaran bahasa inggris, bahasa spontan, pengajaran otentik, cara pengajaran tradisional

## INTRODUCTION

In countries where English is taught as a foreign language—with Indonesia being one of them, teaching English is challenging, as there is no formal and informal exposure of English for most of the learners. Some EFL classrooms even include the excessive use of first language, instead of the target language, just like what Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014) found in their study. Most of the participants in their study stated that their first language, Arabic, was excessively used in speaking classes, making them get less opportunity to practice speaking in English.

This is a proof that many teachers still get lost in finding the best way of how to teach English and so, they end up with teaching it just as if other teachers teach other subjects. To illustrate, Mattarima and Hamdan (2011) mention that many teachers employ teacher-centered style of teaching when teaching English, with little opportunities for students to practice English. Hence, regarding that language is not only knowledge, but also a means of communication, English teachers should know well how to teach it, so that their students will be able to grasp and make use of the maximum benefit of learning English in non-English speaking countries.

This paper attempts to provide an idea of how English should be taught in the classroom by discussing Illès and Akcan's (2017) article entitled *Bringing Real-Life Language Use into EFL Classroom* first. Their study came from the thought that in order to be able to meet one of the English functions as Lingua Franca, English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners might always need to shift their formal-form language, the one that they usually used in the classroom, to the native-speaker form of language. This becomes one of the reasons why Illès and Akcan (2017) argued in their article that the teachers should bring real-life language into classroom while they are teaching it. They stated that students should be given an opportunity to use their creativity in using the language, considering that English is used in a less-formal way outside classroom so they would know how to use it appropriately.

In their study, Illès and Akcan (2017) involved 25 pre-service English teachers in Turkey and 9 pre-service English teachers in Hungaria. The researchers recorded their classrooms' condition and had semi-controlled interviews with the teachers to investigate the use of real-life language in their classrooms. To start, this paper discusses ideas about language in classroom communication. Then, it presents what Illès and Akcan (2017) found about it and their recommendation for the teachers. Illès and Akcan (2017), nevertheless, only gave one idea about teaching English in EFL classroom as seen from the language that the teachers and students use to communicate in the classroom. Therefore, next, this paper also elaborates more ideas in teaching English as a foreign language.

### **Spontaneous Language in Classroom Communication**

Language used in classroom communication refers to any kind of language that is used during the interaction between teachers and students. It, usually, comes in a formal form, for the teacher has already planned it before. However, students sometimes come across with an unexpected form, which Illès and Akcan (2017) called as *spontaneous language*. It usually appears as an off-topic conversation, i.e. when students just directly express what they have in their mind without thinking twice. This language use, according to Illès and Akcan (2017), was almost like the one that the students used outside the classroom, since it appeared without being scripted, which makes the

learning process become more natural. It, definitely, makes language used in the classroom become too important to be ignored since it has a possibility to give the students enough practice in using the language outside classroom.

Nevertheless, not all teachers consider this spontaneous language important and, so; ignore it whenever it exists in their classroom. This is because the structure of spontaneous language often has incorrect structure. This can be understood, as the students still learn to use the language and, hence, incorrect grammatical form can always appear as an error they make.

### **Findings and Recommendations of Illès & Akcan's Study**

From their study, Illès and Akcan (2017) found that although spontaneous language appeared occasionally, the teachers did not seem to pay attention to and explored it. They tended to ignore it in order to make the classroom conversation run under their control. This was quite regrettable since giving more attention toward spontaneous language, which came in classroom communication, would actually give a chance to have more meaningful and authentic learning. This is one thing that every language classroom needs. By having a meaningful and authentic learning, the students would be more motivated in learning the language. It is in line with what Johansson (2010) found in his study i.e. knowing why they learn and what makes it important for them to learn it is an important factor to spark students' motivation. Everything that they get from the classroom would not go in waste since they know what, when, why, and how they use it. Also, the spontaneous language emerging in the observed classrooms are the results of students' creativity in producing an utterance, which gives benefit not only for improving students' competence but also lessening teacher and students' distance

Illès and Akcan (2017) also found in their interviews that the teachers actually acknowledged the importance of spontaneous language in the classroom communication. They realized that spontaneous language would give benefit to the students, especially in increasing their motivation. Nonetheless, they admitted that they did not know what to do if spontaneous language appeared for they were afraid that the classes' situation would be out of control. Therefore, they decided to deny it whenever it emerged and depended too much on their plans.

From their study, Illès and Akcan (2017) pointed out the importance of spontaneous language in EFL students' language learning process. Hence, they suggested that teachers should not ignore it, or even punish the students when they create it. Instead, the teachers should be prepared for and facilitate it. As Brown (2015) fosters, whenever the students intend to express their ideas and/or thoughts, the teachers need to support them. This idea is also in line with one of the teachers' characteristics in 21<sup>st</sup> century which Ansari and Malik (2013) propose i.e. becoming The Supporter. The teachers, then, should also be given a training to prepare them whenever they get into this unplanned communication. Doing such things really matters since it provides us one way of teaching English; making teaching and learning process become as authentic and interactive as possible through the language used in the classroom.

### **How to Teach English: Making Teaching and Learning Process Close to Real-Life Context**

Personally speaking, the writer agrees with Illès and Akcan's (2017) ideas of using real-life language into classroom. Spontaneous language is a proof that the students are learning to use the language using their own way, and that the students learn to express things, which suddenly pop up in their mind. It, obviously, will bring more real-life situation in the classroom and, therefore, makes learning activity becomes more meaningful. Meaningfulness is something essential when it is about learning a language. If it has no meaning for students, then, they will not be interested in learning and using it. It is therefore advisable for teachers not to ignore students' spontaneous language.

However, in addition to what Illès and Akcan (2017) previously indicated, i.e. making use of spontaneous language emerging in the classroom, the writer goes further with presenting some ideas of how to make the teaching and learning process flow as naturally as possible and what teachers need to prepare to make it happen, i.e. by making teaching and learning process close to real-life context.

Learning English means learning to communicate using English. To make communication happen, teachers should teach it as it is used naturally. They need to give students freedom to use not only spontaneous languages but also authentic materials and real-life context to the students. Authentic materials will trigger the students' creativity in using the language,

which can also lead to spontaneous language. Moreover, they give many benefits to the students as Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) mention that giving authentic materials to the students motivate the students and bring an image of what language in the real life context looks like. They also encourage them to learn the language as they realize that they deal with the language in the real life; they are convinced that the language does exist and is not only in their imagination.

Authentic materials are very effective in bringing real-life contexts into teaching and learning process (Shrum & Glisan, 2000, as cited in Zohoorian, 2014) and so, using them in the classrooms is beneficial as real-life contexts will ease the students in learning the language, i.e. they will learn it by using it and not by memorizing it. They will also have a clear image about how they are supposed to respond, react, and use the target language in various contexts. This way, teachers have already prepared students to deal with various possible contexts that they may experience outside classroom.

Finally yet importantly, to make classroom situation become as real as possible, there needs changes of how teachers conduct a teaching and learning process. To begin with, it is high time to withdraw teacher-centered instruction and turn to learner-centered learning? Students need to be given a chance to be involved in every single learning process and experience it by themselves. Learner-centered classroom enables a communicative classroom situation as they actively engage in negotiating-meaning activities in trying to make themselves understand the language (Breshneh & Riasati, 2014). Worth (2009, as cited in Zohrabi, Tohrabi, & Baybourdiani, 2012), states that by asking students to think about the matters by themselves, they will perform better compared to if it is the teachers who do the thinking for them. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the teachers will lose control over their classes. The teachers still need to be present to facilitate students' learning; yet, they must not dominate the class. In addition, teachers need to minimize the use of first language in the classroom in order to make students become more familiar with the target language.

Naturally, these ideas should be so appropriated as to cover the teaching all four skills, instead of just one particular skill. In this kind of learning environment, the students will likely absorb the language better as they learn how to use it. They learn how to use the language fluently in communication. They learn the language to communicate.

## CONCLUSION

Reviewing Illès and Akcan's study, this paper explores the issue of how spontaneous language in classroom communication can be beneficial to teaching English as a Foreign Language. Spontaneous language emerging in classroom communication provides a bridge for students to a good command of the target language, i.e. grammatically accepted English. In addition, in line with Illès and Akcan's idea, making the teaching and learning process close to real-life contexts, by not only accommodating the spontaneous language but also providing authentic materials, is also favorable. Furthermore, changing teacher-centered teaching and learning process into that which is of learner-centered is commendatory. Hence, teaching and learning process becomes more meaningful to the students and, hopefully, increases their motivation in learning English.

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