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BACHELOR THESIS

TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVE ON CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled “Teacher’s perspective on Classroom Interaction”, is completely my own work and that I used only the sources that are listed on the works cited page.

Prague, 20th March 2012 .............................................................

PECHÁČKOVÁ KLÁRA

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I. Introduction

The title of the thesis “Teacher’s perspective on classroom interaction” suggests that it will be focused on interaction between the teacher and Czech learners in the English lessons. I found this topic very interesting because it is important to realize that not all teachers create a good communicative environment in the class. I am also going to focus on the means and tolls which teachers use to encourage pupils or students to communicate in English. Obviously, these means differ according to the level of English.

The thesis is based on the seminars where we spent a lot of our time discussing the topic of classroom interaction. I used my own observation sheets and I also used the sheets provided by my colleagues. These observations took place at different types of lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools. Because of the different schools, we had the chance to observe different levels of English.

I was very enthusiastic about the subject “Introduction to the English didactics” and I was very interested in the discussed topics. I liked the fact that this subject was related to the practical skills which can be used in the real teaching practices. This was the main reason I chose the theme of this bachelor thesis.

The main topic of this bachelor thesis should provide information about how the teachers at the Czech schools are able to create an open environment of communication, where the learners are not shy to communicate in English. Next, I will research and diagnose if the teachers are giving the learners the exact instructions to work and communicate.

I will use three main methods of the collecting the needed materials. The first method will be the observation in the English lessons, the second method will be information from the observation sheets and the last method I would like to use is the interview with the teachers of the English language.

This thesis is divided into two main parts- theoretical part and practical part. In the theoretical part I used several books and web sites about the classroom interaction where I focused on the types of interaction and how the teachers reach this interaction. The practical part is based primarily on the observations. My
main goal was to find out how the interaction differs at different levels and what the teachers do to create the communicative learning environment.
II. THEORETICAL PART

1 Communication

Verbal communication will be described in this chapter. First, I will focus on communication as a general term and then the overview will be divided into two categories of communication according to the participants in communication, i.e. who communicates - the student or the teacher. This chapter is crucial because classroom interaction is closely connected with communication.

Generally, the authors of the books which are listed in Bibliography, explain the term communication in a similar way. Harmer claims that the phenomenon of communication is extremely complex and it is changing all the time (1991, 46). When we want to communicate, we need one more person at least- somebody must transmit a message and the other must receive it, Malamah-Thomas declares (12). Johnson adds that there must be something unknown for one of the member who is involved in the conversation (62). This unknown thing is called “information gap”. “The purpose of the communication is to bridge this information gap” (Johnson 62).

It is obvious that people communicate for many reasons. “When two people are engaged to each other we can be fairly assume that they are doing so for good reason” (Harmer 1991, 46). Harmer also suggests that people communicate because they want to say something. Harmer also states that they have some communicative purpose, they need to agree, to complain or they want to give some information. Johnson explains the reasons for communications in different way but the content of the statement is quite similar to the other already mentioned statements. “In real life, one person speaks to another because he wishes, e.g. to invite him, to complain to him, to threaten him or to reassure him and this aim will be in his mind all the time he is speaking” (Johnson 63).

Further on, Harmer uses the term “communication progress” which means that the roles of the participants involved in the conversation can change very easily. The speaker can become the listener and vice versa (1991, 47). I would substitute the verb “can” with a stronger expression “must” because when we want to communicate effectively, the roles of the speaker and listener must change very often.
When communication takes place, it does not mean that it is always effective. Inefficiency can be caused by the speaker’s inability to express the idea or it can be caused by the listener when he or she does not have an interest to listen. Harmer states, there is a need or a desire for the communication of both the speaker and the listener (1991, 47). “People communicate more easily with those they have most in common with. When they have little in common with each other, they communicate only with difficulty” (Malamah–Thomas 13). Harmer also mentions that there are many other characteristics for effective communication, e.g. competence on the part of the speakers. But on the other hand he states that many reasons for breakdown in communication can be found (1991, 47). He ascribes listener’s three main conditions for effective communication: they want to listen to “something”, listener has interest in what the speaker is trying to tell and lastly, the listener should be prepared to accept and understand grammar and vocabulary of the speaker (1991, 47).

We have to keep in mind that the language has many forms and each form is appropriate for different situations. We select from the language which is appropriate for the communicative purpose (1991, 46-47). The language differs when talking to friends as opposed to talking in the office. In addition, everybody has a choice what he or she will say (or not say). “... he must choose not only what ideas he wants to express at a given moment, but also what linguistic forms are appropriate to express them” (Johnson 62-63). There is a disadvantage because Johnson claims that this free speaker’s choice of the ideas causes uncertainty in the mind of the listener about what is to be said next (63).

Malamah–Thomas points out the interpersonal communication and he claims: “Facial expressions and the tone of the voice used when speaking can all say much more about how a person feels than the words that he or she actually utters” (Malamah–Thomas 17).
1.1 Student

In this part of the thesis I will focus on the communication process from the student’s point of view. I will be discussing information based on a student in a foreign language class.

Student’s communication during the lesson has the same rules like communication in general. Of course, there are some minor differences because the communication takes place on different levels. Communication in the classroom must be more formal and students are usually forced to talk about selected themes or about something that the teacher assigns. Harmer writes that students have to have the desire to communicate. But if they do not want to be involved in the conversation, the communication is not effective and in turn will fail (1991, 49).

The communication process is very important for the students. By using the appropriate language they should be able to achieve an objective. The purpose is the most important part of communication. If the students do not have this purpose, they are concentrated mainly on the language form and not on the objective (1991, 49). It is clear, for the effective communication we must have some goal in mind. We have to know what we want to tell to our partner. Without objectives, any conversation is useless because we talk just for talking.

Sometimes not easy to make the students speak in a foreign language because they are shy when talking in front of their peers or they do not have enough self-confidence in their vocabulary. From my own experience, it is not good to correct students all the time. This problem is connected with the fluency and accuracy. When the students reach a certain level in the target foreign language, it is important to give them space to express their ideas and opinions freely. When the teacher does so, the learners will feel free and comfortable to say anything. This allows them to speak with small mistakes and in turn supports their fluency. Student speaking is closely linked with the teacher because it is the teacher who gives the instructions and nominates who will speak. Underwood gives the teachers a following piece of advice: “You will have to balance your encouragement of fluency with the need for accuracy” (Underwood 30). Optimal situation is when the learners are not afraid of speaking and at the same time they are able to express something without serious mistakes.
1.2 Teacher

In this chapter, attention will be paid to the teacher’s communication in the class. I will focus on how and what instructions the teacher gives to the learners and in what manner he or she communicates with those students. Students should realize the teacher is an authority which is above them and they are supposed to obey this authority. If they do not respect it, every effort of the teacher will fail.

The teacher has several possibilities how to communicate with the learners. Malamah–Thomas writes that the teachers can communicate with the whole class, a group of students, or an individual student at the different points of the class (12). As was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the base of the communication is some purpose. Malamah–Thomas claims that the reason for undertaking the communication in the classroom is to present a new structure, to explain a new word,... (14). The author continues saying, this type of communication has a strictly pedagogic content. The teacher gives information about the grammar, how linguistic skills (reading, listening) operate in the particular language. Educators also familiarize the learners about the culture of the country of which language they study (15).

“The best activity in the world is a waste of time if the students don’t understand what it is they are supposed to do” (Harmer, 4 1998). Simply, the teacher should know how to give the instructions so they are understood by the learners. Harmer mentions two general rules of giving the instructions. “...they must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be logical” (Harmer 4, 1998). Before giving the instructions the pedagogue has to pose several questions to themselves. If he or she does not do so, the message may be seen as incomprehensible and the students may be confused about what they are supposed to do. Teacher’s task is to answer these questions: “What is the important information I am trying to convey? What must the students know if they are to complete this activity successfully? Which information do they need first? Which should come next?” (Harmer 4, 1998).

Some teaching aids like posters, chalkboards or projectors can be also very helpful during the lesson. I heard this saying somewhere: “What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I know”. When the teacher uses these teaching aids, they help to explain new words, new grammar, which in turn the learners
understand more easily. Malamah–Thomas adds that the teacher can develop the gestures or mime, to get the message across (18). Miming and gesturing belong to non-verbal communication and if the educator can “read” students’ body language it might be helpful in the teaching. We use this type of communication without thinking about it and that is why we say that it is difficult to lie when using body language. If the teachers are attentive, they can easily recognize if the students are bored or involved in the activity with interest. The body language falls into the category of the non-verbal communication and Malamah–Thomas points out the non-verbal resources as an instrument of communication play as important role as language (17).

1.3 Summary

In the previous subchapters the phenomenon of communication was examined. I focused on communication in general, on the student’s communication and finally on the communication from the teacher’s viewpoint. I mentioned some of the reasons and the rules for effective communication. I showed some types of the communication such as non-verbal communication and communication by means of the teaching tools.

People are not able to communicate with each other without some kind of the interaction. It is the same with the students who learn a foreign language. Interaction should be going on between the teachers and also between the students during a lesson. How interaction will develop depends on the teacher.
2 Classroom Interaction

As the title suggests, this chapter will be dedicated to classroom interaction in general. The term classroom interaction will be described. Then I will explain the function of the class and for what purposes it exists.

Communication in the class is understood through classroom interaction. In other words, in order for interaction to be realized, there must be some kind of the contact between the teacher and the learners. It does not have to be just the verbal interaction but the teachers can also try the non-verbal communication (mime, teaching aids...). Every subject requires a different type of interaction. When we compare the subject chemistry with the language, the methods of interaction differ immensely. While the students of natural science usually need just headwords for preparing some solution, the students of language need to communicate in whole sentences. It is because the main aim of this kind of the subject is to teach the learners a confident discourse, both written and spoken.

Classroom interaction takes place in the class, so I would like to mention, marginally, the function of the class. Malamah–Thomas gives the possible answer. Class differs from other social situations because it is established for pedagogic purpose, for learning (17). The participants of the class realize the interaction in order to learn new things.

Malamah–Thomas suggests that there are also other types of the classroom interaction between the participants and the teacher. Many times, textbooks are used. In such cases, the textbook writer is seen as the transmitter of the message. This transmitter communicates indirectly with the students and also with the teacher (13). Another type of classroom interaction can be listening exercises where the voice from the recorder gives the instructions. This was a marginal reference and now I will turn my attention to classroom interaction between the teacher and learners.
3 Classroom Interaction in the English Lessons

This chapter will relate to the teacher. It is the teacher who enables the effective communication during the lessons of the English language. It is he/she who gives the instructions and leads the learners. I will try to find out by what means the educator creates a communicative environment, how often the teacher speaks in proportion to the students speaking. I will focus on the strategies which the teachers use to make the students complete group work, pair work, individual work or the work with the whole class.

The best example is when the lesson is conducted in English. When the instructions of the teacher are given in English, the students will become used to it. For the teacher, it is important to use English themselves as the normal language of communication and to do this from the very first meeting with a new class. This makes it understandable to your students that you want to conduct the whole lesson in English” (Underwood 36). In addition, addressing the students in English even outside the class is a good idea according to Underwood (36). Speaking in English can be found frustrating for the students and because of this they will not cooperate. It is up to the teacher to create a pleasant environment where the students feel that the teacher will help them when they need help (36-37). A different situation comes with the beginner’s class. These learners do not know enough vocabulary and they know just a little bit of grammar. In this case it is not bad when the learners say something in their native language. The teacher is supposed to say the same thing in English and ask them to repeat it (Underwood 37).

3.1 Teacher Talking Time\(^1\) vs. Student Talking Time\(^2\)

Classroom interaction requires communication between the teacher and the learners. There is a term “talking time” which means how much the person speaks in a certain period. Because I deal with a classroom, this talking time is divided between the teacher talking time and the student talking time. The main task of this chapter will be to discuss how much a teacher’s talking time is needed during a class.

\(^1\) Teacher Talking Time= TTT
\(^2\) Student Talking Time= STT
Harmer points out that there is a lot of debate going on about the amount of time teachers should spend talking in the class (1998, 4). “...getting students to speak – to use the language they are learning – is a vital part of a teacher’s job” (Harmer 4, 1998). The web site writes that the teacher need’s to speak more when providing an explanation, but the maximum time which the teacher should spend on speaking is approximately 20% - 30%, so the STT should be around 80% during the lesson. Darn confirms this statement. “The amount of time spent in T/class mode will depend on factors such as the students and how much they know, the stage of the lesson, the time of day and what is being taught, but a useful guideline is a limit of 30% of a lesson, and no more than 10 minutes at one time” (Darn). Harmer remarks that the best lessons are considered the ones where the student talking time is maximised. On the other hand, the teacher is not afraid to summarize what is happening or enter the discussion at appropriate moments. But if the teacher’s voice drones and the students are not given the opportunity to speak, this class is not very effective for the students (4, 1998). Darn claims that when the students are given an opportunity to speak, they will become familiar with the target language more easily (Darn).

The teacher talking time does not have to be understood only in a negative way. The teacher is a language model for the students. It means that he or she is one of the authentic agents of the target language. Wilden mentions personal presentation in the context, which can be provided only by the teacher rather than by listening or reading. The teacher’s talking is flexible and he or she reacts immediately. The natural conversation encourages the questioning or commenting and it contributes to the everyday language which is sometimes overlooked in course materials (Wilden).

In Harmer’s words, the students are the people who need to practise the language, not the teacher (4, 1998). Darn summarizes teacher talking time: “It is not easy to reduce the TTT when talking to the students is a natural thing to do... However bearing in mind the nature of the communicative classroom, teachers should perhaps be aware of the quality of their TTT and how it is used rather than trying to reduce it to a bare minimum”. (Darn).
3.2 Strategies How to Achieve Interaction in the Class

This subchapter will deal with the different types of grouping which the teacher can use during the work with the learners. In my opinion, the worst thing which can happen in the class is the boredom. It can be caused by many factors such as the lack of interest or by the same activity for a long time. The research on the web site Live Science was published. It claims that about 30% of the students are bored because of the lack of interaction between them and teacher. “Just listening to the teacher all the time is boring. Students lose motivation” (Bryner). In the next lines I will focus on the different types of grouping.

Underwood warns the teachers that it is very easy to miss the attention of the students while doing the oral practise and he also points out that many teachers are used to focus on one particular section of the class, although they do not realise it (41). According to Underwood, the teacher has to be able to ensure the activities during which the rest of the class does not lose the interest (41). There is a solution how the teacher can avoid this tendency. “Whatever the seating arrangement in a classroom, students can be organised in different ways: they can work as a whole class, in groups, in pairs, or individually” (Harmer 20, 1998). These types of grouping belong to the learner - centred classrooms where students working in pairs or groups understand and remember new information better (Bradford).

3.2.1 Group Work and Pair Pork

Group work and pair work are two similar types of grouping learners use because pair work is cooperation between two students (it can be understood as the small group). This is the reason why I decided to put these two types of grouping together. I will explain why these groupings are beneficial for the students, what the teacher’s task is during these activities and what possible difficulties can occur.

“Ability grouping, also called by some (erroneously), instructional grouping, is based on the belief that students can be placed into various groups or configurations for teaching purposes in schooling and education” (Dr. Kizlik). But Ur defines group work as the activity, where the learners perform a learning task
through small-group interaction (232). According to Harmer it is the cooperative activity (21, 1998). Dr. Kizlik provides us with several characteristics of group and pair work, which both students and teachers have to realize. “Student interaction and social skills are required, but the purpose of grouping is not primarily social. Group time is not "free time" for student (or teacher). Cooperation is valued over competition. The teacher is always actively involved in the students' learning process, serving as a resource person, questioner, guide, evaluator, and coach” (Kizlik).

The authors share the opinion that this type of grouping is very important and effective for the learners. “...these have become increasingly popular in language teaching since they are seen to have many advantages” (Harmer 21, 1998). Ur adds that the grouping and pair work is very effective, it activates the students and it supports their fluency (232). “Learners in a class that is divided into five groups get five times more as many opportunities to talk as in full-class organization” (Ur 232). When the students are grouped they cooperate more equally and what is more important, they are able to experiment using the language, Harmer points out (21, 1998). Ur continues saying that this type of grouping contributes to the learners’ independence, responsibility and that it can contribute to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the class (232). Harmer has the same opinion as Ur. Both pair work and group work give the students more independence. Harmer also states, they feel more comfortable because the teacher does not control every move and the learner is not under the pressure of talking in front of the class (21, 1998).

From the educators’ perspective, this type of grouping can be beneficial for them because pair work or group work, Harmer says, gives the opportunity to work with individual students in their groups (21, 1998). On the other hand, some teachers fear they may lose control, because the learners may be too noisy or will be using their mother tongue instead of English (Ur 232). The pedagogues can also get together with the problems when using this method of learning. Harmer remarks that the learners may not like the classmates they are supposed to work with, one student in the group can be silent and they speak in their mother tongue, rather than English when the teacher does not pay attention to them (21, 1998).
Successful group work depends on several factors such as surrounding social climate, interesting and stimulation tasks or effective and careful organization, Ur observes (232-233). It means that the groupings have to have certain rules. Ur defines four steps of group work organization. The first one is “Presentation” where the teacher gives instructions on what they are supposed to do. The second step is “Process”- the teacher goes from one group to another, monitors them, and gives them advice when needed. The next step “Ending” consists of stopping the activity. The last step is called “Feedback”. It is the session of the class where the learner’s debate about the task or the solution that is given (234). The ways of grouping also fall into the organization. Budden writes about the three main ways of grouping: giving students the choice (if the students can choose, they always group with the friends), random grouping (it ensures that the students work with different classmates, or selecting the groups based on the activity).

“Note also that a class may not readily take to group work if it is used to being constantly teacher-directed. But this is something that can be taught through practise. Teachers should not give up if their first attempt at group work is unsatisfactory” (Ur 233).

3.2.2 Individual Work

Individual work is an important activity in both teaching and learning. Through individual work we understand listening, writing and reading. These activities are done by an individual student and they can also be the basis for class discussion. Solo work is assigned by the teacher but the activity itself is up to the students.

It allows the students to work alone, they can work at their own speed and in addition they are individuals for a short time, Harmer writes (21, 1998). Ur adds that the students take responsibility for their work (233).

Ur gives the suggestions how the solo work can be learned. The work of individuals can be learned through the reading an article to themselves. When listening takes place, the teacher plays a recorded text and asks the class to note what they understand (236).
3.2.3 Whole Class Work

Whole class work is the next working strategy with the learners. This strategy in some cases it is over used by teachers. Nevertheless, it is necessary to use it during some activities. Whole class work usually proceeds from some other activities like group work or pair work and it usually forms a debate or discussion. It can also follow the individual activity of the students (listening, reading, writing). After these activities the teacher usually asks questions or a discussion takes place.

The “feedback” was mentioned as the third step of the group or pair work. It can be seen as a whole class activity because the whole class is debating about the theme which was discussed in the groups. The students convey their opinions or they try to figure out the solution together. The article by Andrewes states that each class is very diverse. The larger the group, the more opinions, ideas and experiences there are. This contributes to the learning process. “Furthermore, whole-class discussion is likely to be content based, rather than form based, encouraging fluency and a more memorable and meaningful exchange among the participants” (Andrewes).

Kelly provides several advantages about working with the whole class. The whole class discussion provides the interaction between the teacher and the class and the teacher can check on by the questions what the students remember. The learners are more concentrated during the lesson because they might be called on to answer at any time (Kelly).

Whole class work is not beneficial for everyone because some students may feel uncomfortable when talking in front of the whole class. Even if the teacher does not give certain rules, the debate can quickly go off-topic, Kelly claims.
3.3 Summary

Interaction is important for communication, especially in a foreign language class. The teacher should give the students as many opportunities as he or she can. When the students are not given these opportunities to speak, they will not be able to speak in a foreign language. In my opinion, most of the lectures should be conducted in English (of course, it depends on the learners’ level).

The next subchapter was dedicated to teacher and student talking times. Student talking time should be maximized and teacher talking time should be reduced to help the students. When teacher talking time dominates, the lecture may be quite boring causing the students to think about other things other than the topic. From my own experience, I preferred a lecture where we were involved as opposed to a lecture where the teacher dominated the conversation. I think that the students remember much more when they “experience” the activity and not just listen to the activity.

When the teachers want the lecture to be interesting and beneficial for their students, they should use different strategies when grouping the class. Four main strategies were mentioned in the previous articles. They are group work, pair work, individual work and whole class work. From my point of view, these activities have to be incorporated in every class. It develops the learners’ cooperation, independence and communicative skills.
III. PRACTICAL PART

The practical part of this bachelor thesis will be dedicated to selected practical issues, in other words, I will deal with classroom interaction in practice. In the previous, theoretical part, I gave the authors’ opinions on communication, classroom interaction and on the strategies how to achieve classroom interaction. Methodologists from all over the world informed us how classroom interaction should look like but the reality is sometimes very different. Because of this fact I will try to compare the “world of theory” with the reality of the classroom.

During my research, I obtained information about classroom interaction in several ways. I observed English lesson. I asked teachers about their opinions but the crucial method of collecting data about classroom interaction, in the lessons, was the analysis of observation sheets provided by my colleagues. We were given these observations during the lessons of the subject “Introduction to the English didactics”. I have to remark that all the observed lessons lasted 45 minutes.

The crucial question of the practical part is how and how often interaction in the classes takes place in reality.

4 Observation Sheets

As was stated above, I used the observation sheets as the main information source about classroom interaction. First I would like to write some basic information on these sheets, how I got them and how I am going to analyze them. Our task during the winter semester in the subject “Introduction to the English didactics” was to fill in at least three of five observation sheets in the different lessons (the choice of school and age/level was optional). Later I borrowed completed sheets from twenty of my colleagues. As a result, I had about sixty observation sheets at my disposal. In the next chapters I am going to analyze these particular sheets one by one.

Finally, I will use three of five observation sheets so the total number is twenty three observation sheets for my analysis. They are divided as follows: Observation Sheet: Focus on Classroom Interaction: 11 sheets, Observation Sheet:

3 for the blank sheets see the “Appendix”
Guided Lesson Description: 5 sheets, Observation Sheet: Focus on the Teacher – Classroom Management: 7 sheets. The observations took place at different schools and levels so they should cover whole range of the schools.

4.1 Observation Sheet: Focus on Classroom Interaction

11 colleagues filled in this observation sheet titled “Focus on Classroom Interaction”. It ranks among the best observation sheets because the theme of classroom interaction appears there the most frequently of all four inspected sheets. From these 11 observations sheets, 5 people observed upper secondary level, age group 15/16 - 19/20, and the rest 6 colleagues observed lower secondary level, age group 11/12 – 14/15. I will analyze both the levels together and I will emphasize the differences if needed. This sheet focuses on the classroom interaction itself so there are several types of interaction, such as: teacher – whole class, teacher – individual learner (in whole class activity), teacher – individual learner (in pair or group work), pair work, group work, individual work, learner – whole class or other. Our task was to measure how many types of interaction took place in the class. In the next chapters I will focus on each type of interaction individually.

The upper secondary level classes had, approximately, the same number of students (it was usually about 12 or 13) in comparison to the lower secondary level where there were mostly 17 students. It is because the pupils at lower secondary tend to be grouped in one learning group, meanwhile the upper secondary is usually divided into several teaching groups. In my opinion smaller groups are better because the teacher can make either groups or pairs which contribute to interaction during the lesson. Smaller amount of the learners also provides better conditions for learning and friendly atmosphere which causes that the students have “closer” relationship to the teacher and vice versa.
4.1.1 Teacher – Whole Class

As I supposed, most of the time, at both levels, was spent on doing the work with the whole class, it means that the teacher interacted with the students as a whole. Most commonly mentioned activities during this interaction was explanation of new grammar or topic. Time was also spent on teacher’s general questions at the beginning of the lesson, on checking homework or on repeating the grammar from the previous lesson. The younger learners worked as a whole class while they were playing the game called “word football” where the teacher gave the first word (e.g. cat) and the student had to say the word which ended with letter “t” (e.g. tree), and so on. If someone was thinking for a long time, he or she was out of the game. It is obvious that some teacher - whole class interaction is appropriate but it should not last for a long time. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher can spend some time giving the instructions, explaining new grammar or checking homework but in my opinion it should not last more than 5-7 minutes.

From my experience, this type of interaction is sometimes quite overestimated and fills too much time in some classes. It follows from the sheets that most of the teachers spent 10 minutes at least doing this teacher - whole class interaction and once it was even 17 minutes which is not inopportune when we take into consideration that the lessons lasts 45 minutes. As I have written in the theoretical part, it is not the teacher who should speak most of the time, it is the learner who has to practise the language and I absolutely agree with this opinion.

4.1.2 Teacher – Individual Learner (in the whole class activity)

Teacher - individual learner (in whole class activity) interaction sometimes overlaps with the previous one and it is also very common. This type of interaction appeared when doing the exercises in the course book. The learners were called on to answer the question or to tell the correct word. The next common activity was something like the simple conversation between the teacher and the learner before the whole class. The topic of the lesson was “Travelling”, the teacher called somebody on and asked: “What do you miss when you are away from home?”.
Actually, I think that it is not a bad type of interaction if the teacher knows how to do it. When it is overused it can become boring. When the teacher poses the question and calls on one by one, the learners get bored and stop paying attention soon after. It happens also when the teacher calls on one student before asking the question. It is better to pose the question and immediately after that to call somebody on.

4.1.3 Teacher – Individual Learner (in pair or group work)

The next interaction is between teacher and individual student but not in the whole class activity but in pair or group work. These two types of interaction are quite similar and it seems that some of my colleagues understood it incorrectly because they mentioned activities which should have been stated in the previous type of interaction. All these observations took place at lower secondary level and 5 colleagues did not complete this line at all. It could prefigure that not much pair work is done or it is done but without the teacher’s intervention. One colleague mentioned that during this activity, the teacher was going around the class, was monitoring pair or group work and asked additional questions. In most cases, interaction between teacher - learner (in whole class activity) and between teacher - learner (in pair or group work) overlaps a lot. These activities were taken down: checking the exercises or asking the opinions.

If I should give my opinion, I would say that this type of interaction is not used so much. When we did pair or group work, our teacher did not monitor our work so it sometimes happened that my classmates switched into Czech. During this type of interaction, the teacher should monitor the pairs or small groups, ask additional questions or give some advice, if requested.

4.1.4 Pair Work

It follows from the sheets, surprisingly, that not many teachers used pair work during their lessons. At lower secondary level, the learners worked in pairs in 3 cases out of 6 and at lower secondary schools it was even worse. Only in 2 classes out of 5, pair work was done. These results are quite startling because pair work is very important for development of speaking skills. The most common activity was conversation on a given topic or the learners’ task was to fill the
exercises in pairs. But when pair work appeared in the class, the teacher arranged this grouping quite a lot because she knew that it was important for communication so she did it on communicative purpose - it was about 4 to 6 times per lesson.

In my opinion, pair work should be used as much as possible because it is almost the only activity, where the learners can practise their speaking skills during the conversation with each other. It is also the opinion of the theoreticians who I mentioned in the theoretical part. For example Ur claimed that pair work is effective and supports their fluency and in addition Harmer pointed out that the students are able to experiment with the language in pairs more easily than in front of the whole class. There can be many different reasons why some teachers do not like using pair work. They are afraid of losing control or they worry that the students may use their mother tongue instead of English. The absence of pair work can also be caused by lack of the teacher’s confidence. When I was at grammar school we were asked to make pairs quite a lot but I have to admit that it was something like free time for us. It depends mainly on the teacher how the students perceive it. When the teacher sets the rules of pair work and when he or she monitors this activity it should be no problem and after some time they realize that it is beneficial for both parties.

4.1.5 Group Work

In this case, group work is understood as work in smaller groups within the whole class. Frequency of this activity resembles the results of pair work because in fact it is based on the same principle. It is not a big surprise that only 4 out of 11 colleagues mentioned this interaction (only 1 sheet was completed at lower secondary level). When we take a class of 15 students, they can make smaller groups of five. The purpose is also communicative and the teacher’s task is the same as during pair work - to monitor. Different activities appeared in every sheet. At one school the learners were supposed to make 3 groups, each group was asked to read a part of the text and answer the questions. In other class, 3 groups worked on the Christmas project but it lasted almost the whole lesson which is not good at all. Another type of activity was discussion (the same in pair work) and one colleague observed the groups where the learners were miming in front of the
blackboard and other classmates had to guess what the word was (revision of vocabulary).

When the term “group work” is mentioned, many people imagine the work with the whole class. But the work within smaller groups is also very effective and it helps to develop the communicative skills, too. I think that the principle of this type of interaction is the same as the work in pairs because the similar activities are carried out (conversation on a given topic, exercises, ...). Project work (e.g. Christmas) is very popular activity but if it takes a lot of time (even several weeks) it may be seen as a waste of time and the learners may consider it their free time during the lesson. Big disadvantage is the number of the learners in each group. In every group there is someone who dominates in speaking and someone who is quiet most of the time. It is the teacher’s task to monitor every group and to try to involve each learner. He or she can involve each student in group work, for example by setting roles within the group, it means that one of the learners is the group leader, the second one is secretary (writes the notes), the next one is spoke person, ...

4.1.6 Individual Work

Only 1 colleague observed an upper secondary level lesson but no individual work was done. Since this lesson was focused mainly on discussion, conversation and working in pairs. The other observation sheets indicated that individual work is, immediately after group work, the most favourite interaction used by teachers. One colleague took down that individual work lasted almost 20 minutes and other 9 observation sheets showed the similar results. It is quite alarming because when the learners work individually, on their own, they do not have possibility to speak at all and their communicative skills deteriorate. The common activities for this interaction were exercises in the textbook where the learners were supposed to fill the gaps or create their own sentences, reading or listening. Writing is also one of the activities happening during individual work but nobody observed the lesson like that (it is usually homework to write some short essay). I should highlight that the speaking proceeds from some individual activities, I mean the activities like reading or listening. When the colleagues mentioned reading or listening they wrote that speaking assignment followed.
We can see that individual work is also very important but it is efficient only when it is done with some learning purpose. It is clear that the learners have to practise grammar but it should last only a few minutes and not 20. Many teachers are “friends” with this interaction (which is not actually any interaction at all) because it makes the lesson easier for them. They just give the instructions what the learners are going to do and the whole work is on them. In my opinion when individual work is overused, the learners get bored and the lesson loses attractiveness for them.

4.1.7 Learner – Whole class

Learner – the whole class activity does not seem to be very favourite one. Only in 4 cases my colleagues observed the lesson where this interaction was happening. I expected more observation sheets from upper secondary level but surprisingly, the 3 of 4 of them came from the lower secondary level. One colleague did not note what activity the learners were doing and the other colleagues observed an activity which happened in front of the blackboard. One learner was standing there and was asked to speak about the given topic. Once, the topic was hometown and it had the form of the examination (each learner was speaking for 2 minutes). Or it was the learner - whole class interaction within group work where one learner presented the project on the topic “History of Prague”.

The learner - whole class interaction is not interaction in the true sense of the word (as, e.g. when the learner works individually) because there is usually no interaction between the speaking learner and the class. The class just listens and does not respond in most cases because as we know, when they do not have to make any effort they do not make it. This type of interaction takes very often the form of one learner’s speaking in front of the blackboard so it may be quite frustrating for this learner.

4.1.8 Summary

Most of my colleagues agreed that there was not enough variety in the lesson. The activities changed every 5-7 minutes in average and the type of the interaction did not change much during the lesson (the teachers were usually
“stuck” to one type of interaction). As we can see, this observation sheet “Classroom Interaction” shows us that group or individual work dominated in most of the observed lessons. Several times, it was mentioned that pair work was used to energise the learners in contrary to group work which calmed them down. In the lessons where pair work appeared the teachers tried to monitor the learners’ work, encouraged them to speak in English or helped them if necessary. Unfortunately, there were also the classes where the teacher did not monitor pair or group work and instead she did something different. In this case, this activity is useless because the learners could speak in Czech and could speak about something completely different.

4.2 Observation Sheet: Guided Lesson Description

Only 5 my colleagues chose this type of observation sheet, 1 of them was completed at primary level (beginners), 1 at lower secondary level and the rest of the sheets at upper secondary level. The number of learners varied from 13 to 16 in the class which is quite enough. During the observations we were supposed to watch the learners and take notes about the activities and grouping in the class. We also had to focus on timing of each activity. We were given 6 questions about the lesson at the bottom of the sheet and we had to fill in them (I will mention these questions later). I will describe and compare the lessons from beginning to finish with respect to interaction.

At the beginning of the lesson, there was always some time spent on introduction a new topic or explaining new grammar (teacher - whole class interaction). The teacher in one class was introducing new grammar for 15 minutes instead of 7 minutes at the most. Considering that the lesson lasts 45 minutes it is inopportune. In every observed class pair or group work appeared but unfortunately it usually lasted only 5 or six minutes. The rest of time was spent on interaction between the teacher and whole class or on individual work. But there was one exception during group work where learners were divided into two bigger groups and the teacher gave them the topic of discussion. One group had to defend their opinion and the task of the other group was to disprove it. The learners were involved in this activity for almost 20 minutes which is quite enough. I think that 10 minutes would suffice. The teacher did not participate or
correct the mistakes, so the learners had enough space to express their opinions freely and used the language more naturally. In one of the papers I could see that pair work followed individual work (reading about Czech towns). The learners read the text individually and then they made pairs. In these pairs they were discussing the comprehension questions related to the article (6 minutes). I appreciated very much that even at primary level pair work appeared. In addition, they were the children who had the English language for the first time. In my opinion it is very good when the learners start to have conversation as soon as possible because they will use to it and they will not be shy to speak in future. The lesson was focused on the things which surround us, the learners were in pairs and one pupil asked: “What is it?”, then the roles switched. The teacher was walking around the class, was observing and correcting them.

Listening, reading or writing the test are the individual activities during the lesson which took place in 2 out of 5 observed lessons. I would start with the testing. As my colleague noticed, it is no good to finish the lesson with the test. She pointed out: “Finishing the lesson with a test is not a good idea- all the learners kept on studying for it for the whole lesson.” I absolutely agree with this opinion so this type of individual work should be put at the beginning of the lesson because the learners will be more concentrated during the rest of the lesson. When the learners do the listening activities, they usually listen to the conversation in textbook related to the discussed topic. I think that the learners welcome every change so it is very good to use song like one teacher did. There is a possibility to ask the learners which song they would like to listen to and the teacher has plenty of time to prepare it for the next lesson. During listening to the song, the learners filled in the missing word and then they corrected it together (it all lasted for 12 minutes).

Student - whole class interaction appeared only once, it was in the last grade of grammar school and the learners were revising graduation topics “Family” and “My Friend”. The teacher examined 2 learners in front of the blackboard. Each student was speaking for 5 minutes and then the classmates prepared the questions.
4.2.1 Summary

In this summary, I will focus on some additional questions which we answered on the bottom of this observation sheet. 4 of 5 my colleagues agree that the learners were working individually most of the time or they were listening to the teacher explaining new topic it corresponds to teacher - whole class interaction. They also point out that there was not enough pair work as it could be but at the same one my colleague highlights the teacher’s initiative and saving the time when learners doing pair work. She was not just observing their work but she also used time to prepare the materials for the next activity. 2 colleagues appreciate that the teacher did not speak too much and she gave the speaking opportunities to her learners and that almost whole lesson was conducted in English.

4.3 Observation Sheet: Focus on the Teacher – Classroom Management

This observation sheet titled “Focus on the Teacher – Class Management” is focused mainly on the teacher, how he or she begins the lesson, what he or she wants to achieve by the end of the lesson, ... When I read these observation sheets through I found out that 6 colleagues had mentioned the activities which concern also the classroom interaction and because of that I can use them for my work and analyze them. The observation sheets are fifty fifty, I mean that 3 of them were filled in at lower secondary level and the rest at upper secondary level. The answers were similar at the both levels and I would even say that they were the same.

There were 14 questions but for my purpose I used only 1 of them. It was the question No.11: “Which activities in the lesson do you think were the most valuable for the learners. Why?”. As this question suggests, the answers will be very positive because my colleagues should have taken down the activities which they considered the most beneficial (valuable). No wonder that they found the games and the speaking activities the most valuable ones. In many cases the reading and speaking activities were appreciated because later on, they were followed by speaking, either in the pairs or within the smaller groups. When
listening took place, one colleague highlighted the fact that the learners were listening to the real English accent. The advantage of the listening activity can be seen in the number of the tasks which can be done during it. There was the note that the listening activity was structured very well because it concerns 3 kinds of activities: the listening itself, speaking based on the listening and practicing different phrases to express opinions. The next valuable activity was pair work realizing through the conversation. The learner’s task was to practise the expressions of surprise which was the topic and the main aim of the lesson.

Three times, the importance of the games during the lesson was stressed. The learners had fun and at the same time they could practise or learn something new. All three games were done at lower secondary level. One of them was titled “Guessing Game”- the learners were practicing the animals and the aim of this game was to try to uncover the unfinished drawings of one particular animal. The task of the next game was miming the verbs. The last one was so called “pretending game” because the learners were pretending to be in a shop and asking for different things (bottle of milk, bar of chocolate, ...) - the topic of the lesson were countable and uncountable nouns.

4.3.1 Summary

As we can see, all my colleagues, who completed this observation sheet, agreed about the importance of the speaking activities as the type of the classroom interaction. It emerged that the time spent on speaking and the conversation is the most valuable part of the lesson of foreign language, in our case it is English. The question “What have you learned?” was answered similarly almost in every analyzed sheet. The colleagues pointed out the importance of fluency in the speaking which is possible only when the teachers let the learners speak freely. They add that it is quite important not to correct every single mistake which the learner makes because then the learners lose their enthusiasm.
5 My Own Observation

During my own observations in the lessons of the English language, I realized that the reality is really different from what the theoreticians say. In this chapter I would like to share my observation experience at schools and I will try to mention what I liked or did not like about these observed lessons. Most of my observations took place at grammar schools either at lower secondary or at upper secondary level and I also observed the lesson at primary school.

In some cases, I was quite surprised how the lessons looked like because my notion about them differed in many ways. I thought that every teacher tries to speak in English as much as possible but I was pretty wrong. I wondered that both the learners and even the teacher herself seemed to be bored most of the lesson. She came to the class, greeted the learners in Czech and sat on the chair where she stayed the whole lesson. She was about fifty years old and I could see that she was not enthusiastic any more. Although, in my opinion the teacher can be enthusiastic even after many years of teaching but it depends on him/her what attitude the teacher maintains. When I was speaking with her she told me: “I do not like teaching the learners any more because this generation is horrible, they think that they can do everything.” It is clear, when the teacher does not give the learners chance, interaction cannot work because the learners know that it is useless to make some efforts. Most of the lesson was conducted in the Czech language and when it happened that the teacher turned to English, it was just for a while. She posed a question and when nobody answered immediately she repeated in Czech. I think that the students wanted to try to answer but she did not give them enough time. On the other hand I had to highlight that she arranged pair work several times during the lesson but she did not monitor it too much. The question is whether this pair work was effective when the teacher did not know if the learners were speaking English. To sum up, if I were the learner in this class, I would be bored because the teacher was passive, did not make a communicative environment and she did not support the learners in speaking.

The next observed lesson was different in many ways and it seemed to me much better. The teacher was speaking English during the whole lesson (even if it was at primary school) what I found very positive and beneficial for the learners.
She came to the class smiling and with good mood, greeted the learners in English and they answered in English, too. I appreciated that she started the lesson with these questions: “How are you?, What did you do during the weekend?”. The learners had enough time to calm down and they started to concentrate. In comparison with the previous teacher, this teacher asked the question, gave the learners time to think about it and when they did not understand, she repeated the question again in English or paraphrased it. What I liked was that the teacher posed the question and then she nominated somebody so that all learners had to be prepared to answer and they had to pay attention. I could not see any pair or group work, the teacher was working with the whole class or with the individual learners. But not everything was so positive. The teacher got angry very easily even it was not necessary. I noticed that some learners were quite afraid of saying something because they did not know what to expect from the teacher. I wondered when she asked about the project which the learners were supposed to do. The teacher told one girl that she did not have prepare on it too much because she was good at English and there was no problem in speaking before the class. I would never say it because this girl can stop doing her best and she can have feeling that she does not have to learn. It is also unfair because of the rest of the class. They can try to do their best and they know that the teacher does not appreciate it, they can lose their motivation.

To sup up, I observed some good lessons and some bad lessons. I learnt that not everything is the same as it is written in the books and it is mainly up to the teacher if the learners are looking forward the English lessons. If the teacher likes teaching and makes the lesson interesting for the learners, the students appreciate it and try to do their best even if English is not their favourite subject. The best thing is when the learners are forced (in positive sense) to be active in the lesson and when they have the possibility to speak.
IV. Conclusion

The theme of the classroom interaction from the teacher’s point of view in the lessons of the English language was examined in this bachelor thesis. My main goal was to find out what the teachers do to create the communicative learning environment and how interaction differs at different levels. This aim was realized in the practical part.

In the theoretical part, I was concerned with the type of communication in the class and then the authors’ opinions and experience on interaction were presented. One chapter was also dedicated to teacher and student talking time and lastly, I aimed my attention to the strategies how the teacher can achieve interaction in the class.

The practical part was devoted to the analysis of the observation sheets concerning different types of interaction in the class. I focused on the strategies which the teachers use to encourage their learners in speaking in the English language and I also gave my opinions and comments on this theme. At the beginning of this thesis I intended to make an interview with the teachers but I did not get enough information.

I found out that the theory differs from the praxis quite a lot. However, the theoreticians claim that the learners should be given the opportunity to speak as much as possible, not always this opinion is realized during the lesson. I see the main problems in the lack of time, in small self-confidence of the teachers or it can be caused by learners who are not sometimes willing to cooperate. In my opinion, the classroom interaction is quite underestimated in many cases and the teachers sometimes do not provide the learners enough opportunities for speaking.

Fortunately, according to the observation sheets it seems that the popularity of interaction increases which is the positive thing. Both the theoreticians and the teachers agree that interaction in the class is very important and beneficial for the learners and that it is necessity during the lesson of foreign language.
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