

Hilda Cahyani
Bambang Yudi Cahyono

Editors

Best Practices
in the Teaching of
English



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Best Practices in the Teaching of English

is an anthology of best practices
in the teaching of English in Indonesia.

Based on the belief that
there is no best practice which is suitable
for all situations and at different times,
this book focuses not only
on the important role of English teachers,
but also on the contribution of
various other factors such as
approaches, teaching and learning activities,
learners, instructional media, cultural aspects,
character building, and professional development.

With 34 chapters on various angles of
how to teach or how to learn English successfully,
it is expected that this book
can give something to everyone
who deals with various facets of
English Language Teaching.



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Strategies to Establish Rapport in EFL Classes

Ahmad Dzo'ul Milal

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Classroom can be viewed from two different perspectives: as a communicative event and as a pedagogical endeavor. All communicative behaviors between interlocutors, i.e. teacher and learners, are intended to serve pedagogical purposes. Teacher's orders, advice, explanations, information, instructions to do tasks, questions and learners' responses in terms of conducting activities or verbal production of utterances should, ideally, be consistent with the lesson objectives and aimed at maximizing the achievement of the goals.

Teacher is inherently powerful (Stubbs, 1983), on the one hand, but for pedagogical reasons, learners need to be empowered, on the other hand. This is in line with the current pedagogical trend of a learner-centered approach where learners are to be given more responsibility, autonomy, and freedom. In other words, learners should be empowered in order to maximize learning achievements.

Implicit in Stubbs' (1983) statement of asymmetrical relationship between teacher and learners, teacher has a higher level than learners. Referring to Martin and Rose's (2004: 248) assertion, "there are five dimensions of inequality in post-colonial society by which we are all positioned, very early life in the home: generation; gender, ethnicity, incapacity, and class." Unequal levels between teacher and learners can be traced in the following circumstances. Normally, teacher belongs to older generation than learners. This variable might not be true in this study because some learners turned out to be older than the teacher, as shown by the result of the questionnaire. Gender is not quite a relevant variable to differentiate between teacher and learners in this study, and neither are ethnicity and class.

The core variable making teacher and learners unequal is capacity. Teacher is supposed to have greater capacity and be more capable than learners. That puts teacher in higher position than learners, hence giving him power to have full control over the lesson, including the learners. Anything the teacher does during the lesson is presumed to be for the benefit of the learners, entailing that teacher is the giver and the learners are the given. Empowerment is likely to be successful if learners feel secure, safe, and unthreatened; and, that is possible when there is rapport (good personal relationship) among classroom participants: teacher and learners.

One of the strategies to establish such a condition is that teacher exercises solidarity in interaction with the learners. Solidarity refers to the addressor's understanding of the addressees by not putting them on the defensive. That might be manifested, for instance, in terms of teachers' acceptance of learners' disagreement, giving chance for arguments, and being more open for two-way communication. Solidarity may also mean to put oneself in the position of another. It includes the feelings of empathy, respect, acknowledging others, care, and love.

Despite the fact that the teacher is inherently the right owner of power over learners in the classroom interaction, he or she also implements various strategies to minimize the effect of such practice. When the teacher is demanding services or information (Halliday, 1985), there are ways by which he or she does it mildly, politely, and non-authoritatively. In that case, he or she practices solidarity in order to build good rapport.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study attempts to describe and explicate a classroom phenomenon of teacher's exercise of solidarity, reflected by the classroom discourses, to build and maintain good personal relationship (rapport) between teacher and learners. The data were obtained from an English language class of mixed-ability adult learners taught by a male teacher. They were collected by audio-visual recording and observation, a one-shot-site technique, preceded by taking some measures of preserving the naturalness of data.

The results of the recording were transcribed so that it is easier to prepare data fragments of teacher-learner interaction which contain such strategies. Observation was done by the researcher's sitting at the back of the classroom taking field notes (Spradley, 1980: 59). This facilitates getting

comprehensive understanding of the corpus and its context which is useful in the process of transcribing and analyzing.

The data were, then, analyzed qualitatively using the techniques proposed by Miles and Huberman (1992: 18), namely data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and interpretation. Parts of the transcript and the notes which were not directly related to the yielding of solidarity were set aside; thus, the remaining data were organized and manageable. The relevant data were, then, displayed in order to enumerate points, draw conclusions, and make interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data show that there are several ways for a teacher to practice solidarity to build rapport in the classroom. They are showing respect, using inclusive pronouns, expressing requests, using affirmative forms to express directive acts, giving praises, asking for personal opinions, using indirect orders, apologizing, accepting criticism, thanking, and offering free choice.

Showing Respect

Despite that higher position, as the data show, the teacher does not play his role authoritatively. He sees his job as a great thing. He pays regards to his learners. He considers that meeting as a special and respectable event. That is indicated by the fact that he bought a new *batik* dress special for that valuable occasion, as he announced it at the beginning of the lesson (*Batik* is an Indonesia ethnic-bound dress usually worn for formal or special events, such as to attend wedding ceremonies).

Now that the teacher says he bought and is wearing such a dress special for learners in that occasion implies that he pays respect to them. Considering the context of that lesson, what the teacher is doing is understandable. That lesson is a part of the In-service Certificate for English Language Teaching (ICELT) course program in which the teacher should be teaching, observed and assessed by the moderator from Cambridge University and the course tutor. The learners attending the class are senior learners, working people who want to study English, not school students.

The reason underlying the teacher's explicit announcement that he has just bought that *batik* dress the day before is special for the learners. Why

should he announce it to the learners? Shouldn't respect be concealed in order not to give the impression of showing off?

Teacher announces the wearing of new *batik* explicitly so that learners know his feeling about them at the initial stage of the lesson. That is intended to create rapport between teacher and learners. This is consistent with one of his personal aims, i.e. "To create a friendly and relaxed learning atmosphere" (stated in teacher's Lesson Plan). What he expects seems to be effective as evidenced by the fact that after his announcement, learners are cheerful with laughters. He does it at the beginning of the lesson because he wants to promote a positive learning attitude of the learners and establish a conducive learning atmosphere since as early lesson stages as possible, hoping that when rapport has been established, the teaching and learning phases would be smooth and effective.

Using Inclusive Pronouns

Inclusive pronouns are referring expressions which include the speaker, e.g. *we*. Using this pronoun means the speaker is included in the proposition being produced. When an addressor says to an addressee, "Now you do this task," this entails the obligation of the addressee to do it without the involvement of the addressor. But, if the speaker says, "Now we do this task," this means the speaker is also involved in doing the task.

Based on that definition, having scrutinized the data, the writer finds that the teacher uses the inclusive pronoun several times. For example:

Fragment 1: Teacher's (T) Announcing a Guessing Game

- (1) T I just want to warm you in the beginning of the lesson
- (2) So, we are doing a guessing game
- (3) So, I will show you some pictures, and then you guess the pictures

This is an excerpt when the teacher is giving instructions to conduct a guessing game. Utterance (2) clearly contains an inclusive pronoun "we". Actually, it is the learners who do the activity. One of them guesses the picture that the others are describing. The teacher is just to manage the game. That is also clear from the preceding and following utterances (1) and (3), when the teacher addresses the learners using "you" meaning that it is the learners who do the task, not involving the teacher.

That the teacher uses an inclusive pronoun implies that he wants to give an impression of solidarity as if he were involved in the activity. If it is not physical involvement, at least it indicates that the teacher is empathetic. When the teacher is putting himself in learners' shoes, learners feel the existence of closer relationship with him, thus lowering their affective filter. Lower affective filter promotes the effectiveness of input (Krashen, 1985).

Expressing Requests

"Please" is one of the linguistic realizations to express requests. Request is a polite way of asking someone to do something. This is normally used by the speaker who has lower power relations than the hearer. The fact that the teacher uses "please" in his instructions to his learners to perform a certain activity, irrespective of his inherent higher position, indicates that he wants to put himself in approximately equal position with the learners. That indicates the practice of solidarity.

Fragment 2: Teacher's Instructing Learners to Do a Guessing Game

- (1) T OK, Bu Leoni. "Teenagers"
- (2) Please, sit down. All right!
- (3) And, next, Pak Putu.
(A male S came forward, took a seat, and T showed a picture to the class on his back)
- (4) Please help Pak Putu to describe this picture.
- (5) Very easy.

In that extract, the teacher orders Ms Leoni to sit down after she takes the turn to be a guesser in the game. Then, he nominates Mr Putu to take Ms Leoni's position and asks all other learners in the class to describe the picture in order to be guessed by Mr Putu. It is clear from the excerpt that the teacher uses "please" in his orders. The question is that why he uses mitigating expression "please" in his order when it is not normally necessary for him to use it.

Despite the use of "please," the teacher does not express a request to the learners because he is in higher position and has full authority to control and to manage the proceedings of the lesson. It is an order, but the order is given empathetically to minimize the impression of power impact in order

for the teacher to appear egalitarian rather than authoritative. This spur of delicate impression is important to create psychologically closer relationship between the teacher and the learners; hence lowering their affective filter (Krashen, 1985).

Using Affirmative Forms to Express Directive Acts

Directive is a social communicative function of speaker's getting the hearer to do something (Searle, 1979). This illocutionary act is normally performed using imperative form of sentences. At this point, there are two linguistic levels dealt with: the syntactic and the pragmatic levels. The former is manifested in the form of sentences; hence there are affirmative, interrogative, and imperative forms (Yule, 1996). Those sentential forms are then put into use at the pragmatic realm when the speaker of the sentences is engaged in communicative activities. At the communication level, linguists deal with the communicative functions of the sentences, i.e. speech acts.

Unfortunately, there is no one-to-one relationship between sentences which are syntactic and acts which are communicative. That is because of the intervening variable of context. In other words, a certain form which is normally manifested in a particular sentence may be used to express a variety of functions when it comes into communicative use. An interrogative form, for instance, which is normally manifested in questions, is not always used to ask but can also be used to express a request, e.g. "Can you open that door?" In Schiffrin's (1994: 85) term, she mentions "one form for many functions" and "many forms for one function."

This pragmatic principle also applies to directive. In order to perform directive acts, one normally uses imperative sentences. In actual communication, however, a speaker may use affirmative form to express directive acts. This can be found in data of classroom discourse.

The above excerpt is the transcript of the teacher's giving instructions to learners to do a game. As an instruction, it is quite likely that the teacher uses imperative forms, such as, "Sit down here; describe this picture and guess what picture it is." In practice, nevertheless, the teacher does not do so. Instead, he uses affirmative sentences like the italicized forms above (Utterances 4, 5, 6, and 11).

The reason underlying such communicative behavior is to be polite or to mitigate the urge of order. Consistent with one of the personal aims the

Fragment 5: Teacher's Instructing Learners to be in Groups Doing Classifying Game

- (1) T OK. Now, *I allow you to work in groups*
....
- (2) OK. Now, *you need this table* (while touching the round tables at the corner of the room)
....
- (3) Now, *I would like you to group based on what they do* when they are still babies, children, teenagers, until married couple.
- (4) So, *you can open this one.*
- (5) You just do grouping, OK?
....
- (6) So, you do this with your group based on its stages.

The verb "allow" in (1) indicates that the teacher uses a permission verb to make learners do the task of working in groups. He could use an imperative form of directive such as "Now, work in groups," but he does not do that. Instead, he uses a permission verb. In utterance (2), instead of bluntly ordering "take this table", teacher says "*you need this table.*" By telling about the need of table, teacher indirectly implies order. The use of "*I would like you to ...*" (3) also implies mitigated order, and so does the use of modal auxiliary "*you can ...*" (4). In short, there are some ways the teacher uses to express indirect orders. That is to make his order less directive and less authoritative implying another indicator of the practice of solidarity, a strategy to build rapport.

Apologizing

Teacher, social inherently, has higher position than learners. As such, there used to be a cynical proverb "Teacher can do no wrong" meaning that whatever the teacher does to the learners is always right. Hence, traditionally, it is unlikely that the teacher apologizes to the learners. There is an underlying reason for this. Teacher is supposed to be more knowledgeable than the learners. His or her main task is to pass on knowledge and/or ability to the learners. Whatever he or she gives to the learners must be right, or at least beneficial for them.

Asking for Personal Opinions

When a speaker is asking a hearer for personal opinions, it indicates that the speaker acknowledges the existence of the hearer. It also implies that the addressor is not authoritarian who imposes his or her own ideas over the addressee. That means the speaker admits that the hearer has the right to be respected, to talk, and to give opinions. Otherwise, the speaker would dictate his or her ideas in such a way that the hearer merely listens, accepts, and follows without giving any opinions.

Based on the data of classroom discourse, it is found out that the teacher does not dictate his own ideas but asks for the learners' personal opinions about something. For example:

Fragment 4: Teacher (T) and Learners (Ls) Discussing Pregnancy as the most Important Event

- (1) T For children, ya? And you got many things to do usually, ya?
- (2) Ls ...
- (3) T Which one is busier? Mother or father usually?
- (4) L1 (one male learner) Both
- (5) T Both ya?
- (6) Do you agree?

The teacher's asking for learners' opinion as in (6), where teacher asks learners whether or not they agree that both father and mother are equally busy, implies that the teacher does not immediately accept an opinion only from one side but he tries to ask for other personal opinions from other learners. That indicates that the teacher admits the authority of the learners to express their ideas to practice solidarity in the classroom.

Using Indirect Orders

Teachers normally give instructions in the form of orders to get learners to do a task. That is the consequence of power they have. In practice, however, as found out in the discourse data, the teacher uses some indirect ways to do so. For example,

Fragment 5: Teacher's Instructing Learners to be in Groups Doing Classifying Game

- (1) T OK. Now, *I allow you to work in groups*
....
- (2) OK. Now, *you need this table* (while touching the round tables at the corner of the room)
...
- (3) Now, *I would like you to group based on what they do* when they are still babies, children, teenagers, until married couple.
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In addition, as a model, teacher is to be imitated by learners. Therefore, teacher is, ideally, error-free. If the teacher is erroneous, the learners will be even more flawed. This is in line with an Indonesian proverb "Guru kencing berdiri, murid kencing berlari" freely translated as, "If the teacher pees standing, learners do it running."

Such a traditional point of view is likely to be currently criticized because it seems to be contradictory against the humanistic idea. A teacher is a human being. As a human, he or she will never be free from errors. "To err is human," says a proverb. So, it is quite normal and natural that a teacher makes a mistake. One way to minimize or neutralize the effect of this mistake is to apologize. This is done by the teacher as evidenced in the discourse data. When he makes a mistake, he apologizes to the learners. This implies that the teacher puts himself in position equal with the learners. He is aware that everyone can make a mistake. Making a mistake is one of human's natural characteristics. When he does so, he expresses an apology as can be seen in Fragment 6.

Accepting Criticism

According to the data of classroom discourse, the teacher accepts criticism from learners. That can be seen in Fragment 6.

Fragment 6: Teacher's (T) Presenting the Target Phrases to Learners (Ls)

- (1) T What is "merawat" in English?
- (2) Ls Take care
- (3) T Take care or take af
- (4) Ls Look... after....
- (5) T Take after
- (6) LI What the difference between *look after* and *take after*?
- (7) T Take after.
- (8) Oh, sorry, sorry. You're right.
- (9) Look after. Look after.
- (10) OK. Thank you.

The above extract represents teacher's checking learners' knowledge if they know the word "merawat" in English (I). Learners answer correctly,

"take care" (2). The teacher accepts it and wants to get its synonym by prompting half of the phrase, "take af..." (3). The learners know what is expected and says, "look after" (4). That is the phrase intended by the teacher actually, but what he says is still consistent with his prompt, "take after" (5). Either knowing it is a slip of the tongue, thus intending to remind him indirectly, or being ignorant, hence asking the meaning, Learner 1 asks a question about the difference between *look after* and *take after* (6). Being asked, the teacher feel reminded and becomes aware of his mistake. Therefore, although first he says, "take after" (7), finally he accepts the learner's reminding and says that he is sorry to make such a mistake and admits learner's indirect correction (8).

That indicates that he does not think of himself as error-free and Mr. Know All (Maugham, 2010). That he is open to criticism implies that the teacher is egalitarian, admits that he has human weakness, and acknowledges the existence of learners. So, accepting criticism is also an indicator of the practice of solidarity.

Thanking

Thanking implies the acknowledgment of the speaker towards the goodness done or given by the hearer to the benefit of the speaker. It is underlain by the feeling of gratitude for some advantage provided by the other person and by that of indebtedness. Actually, teacher is not in the position of being indebted to the learners in academic sense because he or she is institutionally in higher position, naturally more knowledgeable, normally more senior, and inherently the provider, of knowledge and skills, while learners the receiver.

The fact that the teacher, according to the discourse data, thanks the learners for something they have done to him, as can be seen in Utterance (10) of Fragment 6, indicates that he develops good manner, meaning that he does not want to appear superior over the learners. He does not feel offended to be criticized and wants to show that he respects them. In short, the teacher is keen on making the classroom condition conducive as having harmonious psychological relationship between the teacher and the learners.

In the following example (Fragment 7), the teacher thanks the learners even when he is not obliged by the social norm to do so.

Fragment 7: Teacher's (T) Instructing Learners (Ls) to Work in Pairs

- (1) T (T put Ls in pairs). OK, one two. One two. One two. One two
- (2) So, you can choose which one is the most important event in your life. (Ls' pair-work discussion could not be clearly
- (3) recorded).
- (4) OK. Thank you.
- (5) Bu Ida,
you, please tell your friends about ...

The above excerpt represents the teacher's instructing learners to do a pair-work. After learners have finished conducting a pair-work discussion, the teacher thanks them for doing the task, and nominates one of them, Ms Ida, to tell the class about her partner's most important event in his life.

Learners' obedience of the teacher's order to conduct an activity, however good the performance is, does not deserve teacher's gratitude. It is the obligation of the learners to obey him or her. He or she should not be grateful for being obeyed because obedience of the learners is his or her right. But, why does he do so? The teacher wants to appear polite. He wants to show that he respects the learners and what they are doing is great in his eyes. The teacher and learners are being equal, so it is not a command which the powerless must obey. Therefore, when they obey it, he thanks them for it. In sum, teacher's thanking the learners indicates that solidarity is practiced by the teacher.

Offering Free Choice

Another indicator of the practice of solidarity in addition to power is the teacher's giving to the learners the freedom to make choice. For example:

Fragment 8: Feedback Stage after Gap-filling Task

- (1) T OK. I just want to settle down, get married and have many
- (2) children.
- (3) How about number three?
- (4) Who wants to answer number three?
- (5) L5 Bu Leoni!

- (6) T ...
 (7) L3 Number four. *Who's number four?* Yes, please
 (8) T
 Number five. *Who wants to answer number five?*

Utterances (3), (6), and (8) in Fragment 8 contain examples of teacher's giving freedom to learners to make their own decision whether or not they volunteer to give an answer. That implies that the teacher promotes the condition in which learners are autonomous or gives them responsibility to make their own action. This is underlain by his trust to them.

Nevertheless, the teacher is responsible for managing the classroom and making its proceedings flow smoothly. Therefore, when he sees that learners do not quite respond to the option or hesitate and take too long time to react, the teacher does not want to waste more time. Hence, he uses his authority to nominate a learner in order to smoothen the lesson process. That can be seen in (4). However, when he sees that one of the learners is responsive, he immediately calls her to do the task (6).

CONCLUSION

Practicing solidarity shows that teacher is empathetic; hence, building rapport between the teacher and learners, making learners feel secure and self-confident, giving them greater autonomy and responsibility, and establishing classroom harmony. In addition, teacher's practicing solidarity in the classroom bring a number of benefits as follows:

- By showing respect, the teacher is able to arouse learners' self esteem. When learners feel that the teacher pays respect to them, they feel that they deserve some values; hence, growing self confidence.
- The teacher's use of an inclusive pronoun indicates that he/she is empathetic, putting himself or herself in learners' shoes. He/she tries to understand learners' standpoint, their feelings, their needs, and their preferences. In sum, the teacher acknowledges their existence, accepts it, and responds to it.
- When the teacher uses "please" in his order, it indicates that he appears polite and is more persuasive than authoritative. That makes learners feel respected and have greater self-esteem because they feel to be requested rather than commanded.

- The use of affirmative statements to perform directive acts expresses higher level of politeness and mitigates the urge of order; hence, giving learners the feeling of greater freedom and autonomy.
- Given praises, learners become more motivated to pursue further because they feel appreciated in their success in accomplishing good achievement and making good performance.
- When the teacher asks learners for personal opinions about something, it indicates that the teacher respects learners and appears egalitarian, otherwise, he just dictates them to do things.
- By expressing orders indirectly, the teacher is less authoritative, showing his way in building rapport with the learners due to mitigation of imposition of orders.
- The teacher's apologizing shows equal position between the teacher and learners, because the teacher is aware that he is neither error-free nor playing the role of Mr. (or Ms.) Know All (Maugham, 2010).
- That he or she accepts criticism, moreover, implies that he or she is open-minded and democratic. The teacher's thanking learners indicates that he or she develops good manner.
- The teacher's offering free choice to the learners shows that he or she promotes learners' autonomy and responsibility.

Teaching with solidarity should be taken into account by teachers to be implemented in their language classroom practices because that will not only build good rapport between the teacher and learners, but also promote learners' affective engagement. Such a situation is conducive to empower learners; hence, maximizing the effectiveness of the language teaching and learning process.

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