Teaching and Learning English in English at SHSs: Teachers’ Scaffolding

Although heated debates regarding the use of English as the primary language of instruction have been numerous, teachers and students (regardless of their preference) have had to learn how to conduct English classes and achieve their goals with the best possible results.

In Yamada (2011), the author discussed a teaching procedure in which English could be taught and learned. Moreover, it was explored how different forms of instructional scaffolding should be employed at various times in class. This study examines three senior high school English classes that are taught almost entirely in English by three experienced teachers. As Morrison and Low (1983: 323) state, ‘to understand I2, production, we must observe the utterance-building process as it unfolds in real time’. Thus, the following two questions arise:

(1) How do teachers apply instructional scaffolding successfully in their Teaching and Learning English in English (TLEIE) classes?
(2) What can we learn from them?

2. Literature review

Although the term ‘scaffolding’ sometimes mainly refers to dialogic assistance in second language acquisition research, this study applies the term more broadly to mean ‘temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone’, as defined by Gibbons (2002: 10). Table 1 presents a summary of the functions and features of scaffolding suggested by different researchers. Especially in TLEIE classes where students rely on English for meaning making, deliberate assistance by the teacher employing these scaffolding techniques becomes even more important. In this regard, the teacher must structure language activities in a step-by-step manner (in accordance with the students’ understanding and learning speeds) to create an encouraging learning environment that accepts and responds to the students’ meaning-making process so that they can eventually meet the class goals.

The following section describes the different types of scaffolding techniques demonstrated by teachers in classrooms and examines how they affected the students’ learning.

Table 1. Functions and features of scaffolding (summarised by the author)

| Gibbons (2002: 37-38) | ① find a balance between straight “display” questions and those that allow learners to negotiate what they want to say  
② SLOW DOWN the dialogue  
  1) increase “wait time”  
  2) allow more turns before you evaluate or recast (reword) what the learner has said / give learners a chance to formulate  
③ respond to meaning |
② Reduction in degrees of freedom (RDF) – Simplifying or limiting the task demands.  
③ Direction maintenance (DM) – Maintaining motivation and progress toward the goals of the task.  
④ Marking critical features (MCF) – Calling the novice’s attention to important aspects of the task.  
⑤ Frustration control (FC) – Decreasing the novice’s stress.  
⑥ Demonstration (D) – Modelling the preferred procedures to achieve the goals. |
|---|---|
| Yamada & Hristoskova (2011) | ① Linguistic support:  
1) use of topics that students have enough background knowledge about,  
2) use of the language that students already know and the language slightly higher than their current level,  
3) simplification of the language that is beyond their language level by way of paraphrasing,  
4) provision of background information to activate students’ schema when using topics unfamiliar to students,  
5) provision of planning time before speaking,  
6) use of glossary,  
7) instruction of useful expressions for discussion and speaking  
8) instruction in and encouragement of the use of communication strategies  
② Affective support:  
1) use of topics that students are interested in and like,  
2) use of intrinsically motivating materials and tasks,  
3) kind guidance and facilitation of activities, and  
4) encouragement in the form of praising students’ efforts to produce the language, and contribution to class. |
| Lipscomb et al. (2004) | ① breaking the task into smaller more, manageable parts  
② using “think aloud”, or verbalizing thinking processes when completing a task  
③ cooperative learning, which promotes teamwork and dialogue among peers  
④ concrete prompts, questioning  
⑤ coaching  
⑥ cue cards or modelling  
⑦ the activation of background knowledge  
⑧ giving tips, strategies, cues and procedure |
| Applebee and Langer (1983: 6) (Cited from Lipscomb et al (2004)) | ① Intentionality: The task has a clear overall purpose driving any separate activity that may contribute to the whole.  
② Appropriateness: Instructional tasks pose problems that can be solved with help but which students could not successfully complete on their own.  
③ Structure: Modelling and questioning activities are structured around a model of appropriate approaches to the task and lead to a natural sequence of thought and language.  
④ Collaboration: The teacher’s response to student work recasts and expands upon the students’ efforts without rejecting what they have accomplished on their own. The teacher’s primary role is collaborative rather than evaluative. Internalization: External scaffolding for the activity is gradually withdrawn as the patterns are internalized by the students |

3. Class observation

First, this section elaborates on the application of instructional scaffolding in three classrooms. Then, it discusses the main scaffolding techniques witnessed in the classes and how they affected the students’ overall performance. For each class, a brief explanation about the class and teacher’s ideas regarding TLEIE was presented on the basis of author’s interview with the teachers.
3.1 Class 2-A (International Course), Oral Communication I, team taught by Teacher A, a Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) and an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) ⁵

According to Teacher A, who has 18 years of teaching experience, attempts to use English in class as much as possible. However, when she decides that there is a need to use Japanese, she uses Japanese since she believes that it is more important that her students understand the class material. The topic of this particular class was ‘Studying Abroad’ and the students initially worked in pairs and presented one-minute speeches on why they were studying English. Then, they held simple debates (in pairs) regarding whether they would need to go abroad to study English. Finally, in the remaining portion of the class, they divided into groups and simulated travel agencies that offered unique plans to encourage students to travel and study abroad.

(a) Modelling and giving demonstrations

The teachers’ modelling and demonstration effectively helped the students to produce their ideas. Before the students performed their own debate, the teachers demonstrated a mock debate on the basis of the statement, ‘Going abroad to study English is good’. Teacher A represented the affirmative side in which she stated that by going abroad, students could learn about cultures and gain life experience doing activities such as eating local foods and viewing local art. Conversely, the ALT stated that students did not have to travel and they could learn about culture through books. Subsequently, Teacher A insisted that culture can only be experienced in person. Meanwhile, the students listened to their teachers’ demonstration and nodded in agreement with various statements. The following excerpt shows how the students successfully produced their ideas and language building based on those of the teachers:

| A: We can ( ) through ( ) going to abroad, more clearly, than: read books, or watch: n:to Internet, Second point is: er we can make friends, e: e:to ( ) n: I ex I experienced: homestay e: last year, e:to and then, I met a lot of friends, through: n:to I experienced through my homestay, So I think: its: (2) n: it’s good for g good to learn English. (2) So (A nods, and gestures to encourage the next turn to the partner.) |
| B: You said going abroad is ah going abroad, is good, because you have two things (2) First, you can make ah >you can make< yatta You can make friends, you can learn culture, because, (3) (laugh) (JTE tells the negative sides to attack now, and tells the students to have a good eye contact.) |
| B: You can make friends, and can experience culture, but I don’t think so because, n:to because, I want to reason, you say you can make friend in abroad, but we can use Internet, for example: twitter facebook, and so on, If we: if we use, em if we use this, we can make friends through that. … |

(b) Providing tips and procedures

During the debate, the students were constantly reminded to apply speech-like form⁴ and they continued to utilise this approach, as seen in the following excerpt:

| JTE: … before start, make sure, the rule of AREA, and also, sign-posting. firstly, secondly. OK? And, how to attack and defend. ( ) OK? Hmm? |
| ALT: And how many points should they tell. |
| JTE: I think that they have to tell ( ) two. OK. Two topics. |

(c) Recasting while accepting the students’ ideas

In the scenario below, the student attempted to summarise (in one sentence) what she had read in the previous class. The teacher then recast the student’s answer by using the language she had employed. The student listened attentively and smiled as the teacher repeated the speech. In addition, it appeared as
if the student was evaluating whether her language and the content of the speech were appropriate. Upon realising that her answer was acceptable, she smiled.

S: Why, (.) English is used by (.) by? (.) used, all over the world,
JTE: Hmmm. OK. The reason why English is used all over the world. OK (approvingly). (Smiling) Good idea.
   Very good idea. Good. (Other students clap their hands.)

(d) Offering concrete prompts

As seen in the following excerpt, after the teacher provided the students with the language to use at appropriate times, the students applied the language:

JTE: OK, Moderator, make sure that you have to point out to the students, what do you think about the country. And if you are pointed out, I think brah brah brah For example, brah brah brah OK?

(e) Paraphrasing

The excerpt below shows how the teacher effectively explained an unknown phrase to the students by paraphrasing:

JTE: Ah, OK. Home-stay while baby-sitting means that take care of the baby and save the money. For example, if Kitajima-kun stays with my family, baby-sitting, he takes care of my daughter. In return for that, I give him some food. Something like that.

(f) Providing effective support by praising and smiling

Throughout the class, Teacher A consistently praised and smiled at the students, especially during their language activities. This may partly be the reason why the students were both active and relaxed in the class. The following excerpt is one example of Teacher A’s supportive remarks:

JTE: OK. So, I think you’ve done a very good job, and you were a little bit nervous, but you tried to speak good English. Well-done everybody.

(g) Designing the class through a flow-chart approach

This class was designed in a step-by-step manner, similar to a flow chart, so that every activity was in preparation for the following activity. In other words, the students were participating in activities that gradually became more and more difficult and complicated. This accentuated the importance of thoroughness in class preparation.

(h) Other aspects

- Decreasing students’ stress level: The students’ stress level was decreased by allowing them to have sufficient practice in pairs and groups before presenting their work in front of the entire class.
- Assigning a role: Within the group work, each student was assigned a role such as a moderator, sub-leader (reporter), questioner or responder.
- Giving clear and simple directions: Almost no confusion was seen among the students in class.
- Personalising activities: There was a relevance to the students in every task theme so that they were actively expressing their ideas and opinions.
- Use of gestures: In the scenarios, the gestures effectively communicated what the teachers had intended.
- Use of worksheets and blackboards: Worksheets and blackboards were used to aid the students.

3.2 Class 2-B (Academic Course), English II, taught by Teacher B

Teacher B, who has 26 years of teaching experience, stated that he selects English or Japanese as the
main language of instruction, according to the purpose of each class. In this case, the topic of the class was regarding Japanese artist Nonaka Isamu. Most of the class time was spent on post-reading and reviewing the text by summarising it in chronological order and making inferences concerning Nonaka’s state of mind during each stage of his life.

(a) Emphasising, repeating, waiting and paraphrasing

As seen in the following excerpt, one of the typical scaffolding strategies of this teacher included emphasising and repeating keywords, waiting for the students and paraphrasing, which helped the students obtain the correct answers:

| T: In 1918, Isamu was sent back to America from Japan. He was sent back from Japan >to America<. Who(.) who sent him (. to America. hai (Student’s name),
| S1: Isamu’s mother.
| (12)
| T: Hn. She: wanted him to meet good American friends. What happened. What happened to Isamu before, he
| was sent back to America.
| (5)
| T: Something good? ( ) What happened to Isamu.

(b) Giving necessary guidance in individual work

While the students were working individually, the teacher walked around the classroom, checked their progress and focused their attention on certain keywords. For example:

| T: What did he do, what happened to him, what did he realise. (43) OK. World War II, was a disappointing time.
| Why was the period a disappointing time for him. What happened to him.

(c) Simplification of the task by offering choices

As shown in the following excerpt, the teacher simplified the task by providing choices and the students responded well to this approach. Then, when they were asked to give reasons for their choices, they showed an eagerness to express their ideas:

| T: Was he happy, or unhappy when he started to design. Decide yes or no. Or prepare your reason.

(d) Repeating the students’ correct answers

As seen in the following excerpt, the teacher repeated the students’ answers and the students listened to the teacher attentively and showed satisfaction when the teacher repeated their correct responses, thus indicating that a teacher who repeats the students’ correct answers builds their confidence.

| S3: %It was a disappointing time for Isamu.%
| T: Disappointing time. Yeah,
| S3: [%He began to realise that he was not an American. He was not a Japanese. He didn’t know where he was%]
| T: [ n n ] n. OK. Isamu realised that he was not an American, and he was not Japanese. He didn’t know where he was. OK. So the period World War II was a disappointing time for him. OK. Very good.
| S4: %He could not be creative enough %
| T: Ah. He wasn’t. he couldn’t be creative enough because other people didn’t understand him. So he was unhappy. Nn. OK.
(e) Use of blackboard for comprehension and production

The teacher used the blackboard in a manner that clearly guided the students as to how to construct ideas and language.

3.3 Class 1-C (Academic Course), Communication English I, taught by Teacher C

Teacher C, who has 27 years of teaching experience, stated that creating a warm atmosphere where students could communicate with their classmates, personalising and clearly communicating lesson topics for students, and smoothening class procedures were aspects that she cared about the most. When conducting classes mainly in English, she especially attempted to praise her students’ efforts to use the language to build their confidence in speaking. Since the beginning of Communication English I, she has conducted this class primarily in English. The topic of this particular class was about furoshiki (a traditional Japanese wrapping cloth) and the class began with a vocabulary check followed by listening, reading comprehension and reading aloud. The final activity consisted of role playing in which the students could apply all their communication skills.

(a) Applying small steps that could gradually head toward production 1

The tasks were devised so that the students could generate ideas in a step-by-step manner. For example, they discussed the positive aspects of furoshiki in the beginning of the class, and their ideas were eventually used in the role-playing scenario of ‘giving furoshiki to host family as a souvenir’. The first excerpt below shows how the students expressed their ideas as to the positive aspects of furoshiki, while the second excerpt shows how they used these ideas during role playing:

| S1: No sound. Kasha-kasha-kasha |
| T: Ah. No sound. (Students’ voices of surprise) |
| S2: We can use it again and again. |
| T: Ah. use it again and again. Many times. |
| S3: Easy to carry. |
| T: Ah. Easy to carry. You can put it in your pocket, and it’s easy to carry. Anything else. |
| S4: Japanese traditional cultures things. |
| S5: Useful to carry. |
| T: Louder please. |
| S5: Useful to carry. |
| T: Ah. useful to carry, easy to carry, Hnnn. Hai. Anything else? Hai. |
| S6: Eh. Not make garbage. |
| T: It won’t be garbage. Right? Hnn. Hai. Anything else? That’s all? Hnnn. There are many, many good points. And, I think it is light. And someone said around there, we can wrap in any shape. Right? |

| S7: I’m going to give you a present. This is furoshiki. I think furoshiki is good because it is Japanese traditional culture, and it is easy to carry. Here you are. |
| S8: Oh, very happy. |

(b) Applying small steps that could gradually head toward production 2

The class moved systematically from input to output, from vocabulary check, listening comprehension, reading comprehension and reading aloud to production. The students were able to follow this type of class procedure without confusion.
(c) Applying small steps that could gradually head toward production 3

Every communication activity began with the teacher giving demonstrations, followed by the students being divided first into pairs and then into groups. This allowed them to practice and gain confidence in speaking.

(d) Using the blackboard for comprehension and generating ideas

This helped the students formulate logical thinking and express their ideas logically.

4. Answers to the research questions

In the previous section, the author described the scaffolding strategies of the three teachers and how their students learned in their respective classrooms. This section focuses on the two research questions raised in the introduction:

(1) How do teachers apply instructional scaffolding successfully in their TLEIE classes?
(2) What can we learn from them?

4.1 Features of scaffolding employed by Teachers A, B and C

There were three prominent features in the classes observed for this study. First, the class goals were clearly presented to the students and they were constantly reminded of these goals and guided by the teachers' questioning and indication. Second, the classes were structured in a step-by-step manner that suited the students' current levels so that each activity smoothly transitioned into the following activity, which ultimately helped them obtain the class goals. Third, the teachers had a good rapport with the students and the 'teacher's primary role' was 'collaborative rather than evaluative' (Applebee and Langer: 1983, cited in Lipscomb et al.: 2004). In addition, the teachers praised the students' efforts to produce meaning when using the target language, carefully listened to their students' speech and repeated/reworded the phrases that the students used, which provided reassurance to the students. Thus, the teachers constantly ensured that the students were following them.

4.2 Suggestions for TLEIE

This study observed three teachers' scaffolding strategies in their TLEIE classes and found nothing innovative or new regarding the basics of teaching. As stated earlier, the clarification of class goals, the class structure to achieve specific goals in a step-by-step manner and good rapport were all apparent. Furthermore, the teachers utilised English, the target language, so that these basics were obviously highlighted. However, the success of TLEIE classes is because of the teachers who situate their students at the centre of learning, so that they are able to evaluate where the students are in the process of learning, what resources of the students' previous knowledge they could utilise, and what should come next for their development. An effective teacher should know this by having good rapport with his/her student; that is, making good eye contact, responding to their meaning-making process and acknowledging their success, which is some of the key aspects of basic teaching.

5. Conclusion

Based on the observation of the three classes, one of the keys to make TLEIE classes successful is to place the students at the centre of learning. In this situation, the teacher becomes a guide and facilitator of language activities who can apply scaffolding techniques to enhance the students' learning processes. In addition, elaborate class preparation is extremely important and the teacher must create clear class goals and think about the steps that the students can follow to achieve the goals. Such preparation
includes appropriate modelling/demonstration, materials, tasks and language used in class. Finally, in class, the teacher needs to establish good rapport with the students by praising, smiling and responding to their meaning-making process.

The scaffolding observed in this study is not inclusive. Therefore, more observation of successful TLEIE classes is required to reveal how the scaffolding described here and other forms of scaffolding, such as code-switching to assist comprehension, can influence students’ language learning processes differently. At the same time, to truly justify what has been discussed here, additional longitudinal studies are necessary to show the process in which the teachers’ scaffolding gradually disappears and students begin applying the language for targeted purposes without the teachers’ assistance.

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Notes
1 For this study, classes where English is taught and learned in English are called TLEIE classes.
2 We can find such reference in Ellis (2008: 235), Mitchell & Myles (1998: 145), etc.
3 This class was video-taped in the fifth period on November 15, 2011. Textbook used: a textbook that was compiled by the school.
4 “AREA” in the excerpt stands for “assertion, reason(s), example(s)/evidence and assertion.”
5 This class was video-taped in the first period on January 27, 2012. Textbook used: “PROMINENCE English II” Lesson 9 (Tokyo Shoseki).
6 This class was video-taped in the fifth period on June 19, 2013. Textbook used: Genius Communication English I” Lesson 3 (Taishukan Shoten)

The transcription notation symbols used in Lazaraton (2002: 203-204) were employed to transcribe the class dialogues. Also, the italics shows utterances using Japanese words.

References