English Dialogues for Thai Students

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Abstract
This paper aims to indicate appropriate methods for teaching English conversation to Thai students as well as dialogues suitable for Thai situations. In this paper, after characteristics of spoken English is discussed, there is a discussion of preparation for dialogue practice. Following the preparation for dialogue practice, there is conversation. Then comes the expansion of vocabulary. After expansion of vocabulary, comes the application. Then comes the sample of the dialogue. Finally, the conclusion tries to indicate that there are four kinds of methods of teaching English conversation to Thai students.
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Introduction
Conversation is not the result of having memorizing a certain list of sentences. It is, rather, the natural result of having learned a certain amount of language, no matter how little that amount is. What can be taught is some appropriate ways of reacting to certain situations. And that, of course, should be the aim of "conversation" courses: to teach students how to react in English to situations they encounter. However, this does not mean that the students simply learn a series of sentences for one situation or another. In fact, in addition to the situation, there is a great deal of preparation that the student can be taught in the classroom (Widdowson, 1981) and that is very necessary for any kind of effective conversation.

The contexts for many of the dialogues presented in "conversation" textbooks are completely irrelevant to the needs and experience of the great majority of Thai students. Having students spend a lot of time practicing ordering food in a restaurant or requesting a room in a hotel is wasting time, precious time because of the little time that the students have in the English classroom. The great majority of Thai students will order food or request a room in Thai, not in English. (Of course, the waiter or the receptionist may have to understand and speak English at some time, but not the average student.) However, if the student takes a friend that does not speak Thai to a restaurant or helps him request a room in a hotel, then the student must speak English to the foreigner, but not to the waiter or the receptionist.

Thus, the term "Thai situations" (Allen & Vallette, 1977) refers to the possible uses that the students may make of English in Thailand. It seems almost self-evident that the content of conversation courses should be applicable to Thai situations. The use of English in such situations may be student-activated or foreigner-activated: that is, either the student may begin the conversation or the foreigner may begin it. However, they should be taught how to begin such conversations. Such as Where are you from?, Do you work here?, How long have you been in Thailand? etc. Foreigners, especially tourists are more likely to begin conversations with students: such as Do you speak English?, How can I get to Sanam Luang?, What province are you from? etc. Thus, students must know how to respond to a foreigner who begins a conversation in English.

However, no matter what the context, the method of presentation of a dialogue involves at

least four steps: (Bell, 2010) preparation, conversation, expansion, and application. However, before a discussion of the method of dialogue presentation, it is necessary to say a few words about spoken English.

Characteristics of Spoken English

Many students say that they cannot understand a native speaker of English even though they have studied English for ten or twelve years -- because the native speaker speaks too fast. There are certain reasons for this impression, none of which is usually taught in the English language classroom or language laboratory. First, even though a great deal of time is spent in having students practice the various stress and intonation patterns of English, little time seems to be spent in having the students practice the rhythm of English. In some languages, almost every syllable is the same length as every other syllable. In English, however, the number of syllables spoken in a given time depends on the placement of major stress and not on the number of syllables itself (Abbot & Wingard, 1981). For example, the sentences

Tom is a student.

Tom is a good student.

differ in number of syllables, but would probably be spoken in almost the same amount of time.

Perhaps more important is the effect that rhythm in English has on certain words, especially the little words of English. For example, the sentence

Do you want to go to a movie?

contains nine written syllables. In practicing sentences such as this one, Thai students often give equal time to each syllable. In this way, the do, you, to, to, all rhythm with the word blue. The final t of want is often emphasized because many English teachers want to be sure that the students produce the final -nt cluster correctly. Thus, the students practice sentences such as this one in such a way that a native speaker understands them, but also feels that they do not speak English very well. At the same time that the students are practicing sentences such as this one, they are hearing themselves and learning to understand English in a certain way -- a way that is not only incorrect but that also hinders the students' ability to understand spoken English a great deal. In fact, the above sentence would most likely occur as something like

D'y'wanna go to a movie?

in the ordinary speech of most native speakers: that is, because of the rhythm of English, many of the "little" words of English are "reduced" -- they are produced quite differently in isolation and in context. The sentence

Do you want to go to a movie?

also provides examples for at least two other characteristics of English. It will be noticed that the final -t of want and the initial t- of to disappear in spoken English. In fact, it is often the case that some sounds disappear in spoken English, especially when they occur in unstressed positions. For example, the phrase going to in the sentence

I'm going to do my homework now.

is usually produced as gonna. Initial h- in unstressed syllables often disappears, as does the final -z before sh- (as in does she…) often does. The teacher that insists that all the sounds of all the words in a sentence be carefully produced is in fact carefully teaching his students not to understand English. The second characteristic that should be noticed in this sentence is the different pronunciations of the two to's. Thai students are carefully taught that a occurs before consonant sounds and that an occurs before vowel sounds. A fact which is seldom, if ever, mentioned is that many of the "little" words of English have at least two pronunciations, depending on the following sounds. For example, English teachers often carefully teach Thai students to pronounce every sound in the phrase (Byrne, 1976)

a cup of coffee

and then both teachers and students wonder why the students cannot understand the phrase
a cup a coffee
which is the usual pronunciation of the phrase.
The classic example
A. Jeet yet? (Did you eat yet?)
B. No, joo? (No,Did you?)
shows another characteristic of spoken English: the combining and/or changing of certain sounds in certain positions; in this case the final -d and the initial y- (did you) often becomes j- (as in judge). Likewise, final -t and initial y- of you often become ch- (as in church), as in the example
I know whacha want. (I know what you want.)
Finally, the sentences of ordinary everyday spoken English are most often incomplete sentences: that is, they often lack a subject, a verb, or both. This lack is not a hindrance to the understanding of the conversation, however, because the context usually supplies what is missing. For example, the sentence (Eckard & Kearny,1981)
Go to the movie?
by itself is meaningless, but perfectly understandable in a context. If A and B are talking about last night's activities, the sentence probably is
Did you go to the movie?
If A and B are talking about plans for the near future, the sentence probably is
Do you want to go to a movie?
If A and B are talking about C's activities the previous evening, the sentence probably is
Did he go to a movie?
It is even possible for a complete conversation to be carried on with never a mention of either a subject or verb, as in the following conversation which takes place between two sailors walking down the street:
A. Hungry? (Are you hungry?)
B. Thirsty. (No, I'm thirsty.)
A. Coke? (Would you like a Coke?)
B. Beer. (No, I want a beer.)
A. Here? (Shall we have one here?)
B. There. (No, let's go there.)
A conversation such as this is possible (Candlim, 1981) because all the missing parts, given the situation, are available to native speakers of English.
Thus those teachers that insist that the English spoken in the classroom be fairly slow and very clear and that all the sentences be complete sentences are in fact making it completely impossible for their students to understand spoken English. The students will perhaps learn to speak English understandably -- with a very stilted accent -- but they will never be able to understand the English soundtrack of a movie or television program -- the two most accessible sources of spoken English that most Thai students will ever encounter.

Preparation for Dialogue Practice

There are four essential exercises in the preparation for dialogue practice. Two of these exercises are passive in nature: that is, they help prepare the student to produce the dialogue correctly.
The first "passive" exercise involves recognition of the reduced words in the sentences of the dialogue to be presented. At the beginning of a course, this step should perhaps involve having the students listen to a sentence and indicate the reduced words. Thus, for the sentence
Do you want to go to a movie?
The students would first listen to the sentence (perhaps twice) and then indicate the reduced

words, as in the example
Do you |want to| go to a movie?
wanna
Later, the students should indicate the reduced words before they listen to the sentence and the check their work with the spoken sentence.
The second "passive" exercise involves writing out each sentence of the dialogue as a complete sentence. The exercise involving the sample dialogue given in the previous section would be written out as indicated there.
This exercise will ensure that the students are aware of the "complete" sentences in a conversation even though the actual words do not represent complete sentences. It will also give the students practice in remembering subjects, verbs, or both when they disappear after the first mention.
The first "active" exercise involves intonation. In the beginning of a course, the students should listen to a sentence and then indicate using arrows, the general intonation pattern used. Later, they should indicate the intonation pattern before listening to the sentence and should then check their work. Whether or not the students can produce the intonation pattern they predict is a matter of constant practice.
The other "active" exercise involves stress, particularly primary stress. In general, a native speaker of English emphasizes the most important word(s) of a sentence, in particular the word(s) that is (are) required for a minimal understanding of a sentence. In the beginning of a course, the students should listen to a sentence and write the number 1 over the loudest syllable in the sentence and the number 2 over the second loudest, if there is one. Later, they should first decide which words should be marked 1 or 2, because of the importance to the meaning of the whole sentence, and then listen to the sentence and check their predictions.
The use of these four exercises in the classroom has several great advantages. First, the student hears a dialogue many times before he actually produces it. In this way, his ear becomes accustomed to the correct sounds that he must produce. Second, these many repetitions fairly well ensure that the student will memorize the dialogue without in fact trying to memorize it. Third, the variety of activities that are required of the student makes it likely that he will not get bored. Fourth, all these exercises are easily adapted to a testing situation, especially when individual testing is impractical or impossible, but also when a written test as well as an oral one is desired. Fifth, and perhaps most important, the student will understand why a certain intonation pattern or stress pattern is appropriate and not simply repeat something he has been told is appropriate.

Conversation

Before the discussion of the steps to be followed in practicing a dialogue, it is necessary to say a few words about the dialogues used in a "conversation" class. First, the dialogues should be relatively short. A dialogue of four to six lines has proved to be most effective in the presentation method discussed in this paper. Second, the sentence should be relatively short and should gradually increase in length as the students become more fluent. Students can mimic such sentences without having to remember very much.
Practicing a dialogue includes four steps. (Edgar,1969) First, the students hear each line of a dialogue twice and repeat it twice. Second, the students hear each line once and repeat it once. Third, the teacher plays one role in the dialogue and the students play the other. Fourth, the teacher and the students change roles and go through the dialogue again. If the class is small enough, these last two steps can be done by pairs of students.
At this point, it is necessary to discuss the importance of dialogue variations. For example, one of the first dialogues in many textbooks is the following
A. How are you?

B. Fine, thanks. And you?
A. Fine, thanks.
After having learned this dialogue, the student may want to try it on an English-speaking friend.
Student: How are You?
Friend: Miserable.
The result, of course, is that the student is immediately lost: his did not follow the textbook dialogue. In fact, not only are many responses possible for any given question, a given idea may be stated in several different ways. (Widdowson, 1981) For example, the sentences
Where were you born?
Where are you from?
Where do you come from?
are different in structure but have the same basic meaning. Thus, the student that practices only
Where are you from?
many times and "learns" it may not be able to respond to the sentence
Where do you come from?
The steps for both the preparation exercises and the conversation should be followed for the basic dialogue and for the variations that follow it.

Expansion

The expansion section of a dialogue lesson includes either one or both of two parts: vocabulary and structure. The vocabulary expansion part involves exactly that: giving the students additional words that may be used in the sentences in the basic dialogue and dialogue variations. For example, the United States (and India, Brazil, etc.) is divided into states, but the divisions of other countries are called by other names: provinces (Thailand, Canada, etc.): departments (France), prefectures (Japan), etc.
The structure expansion part may contain a great variety of exercises, depending on the structure used in the basic dialogue and in the dialogue variations. The simplest exercise is a substitution drill if it is necessary to review a structure such as the present forms of be, for example. More important are exercises in which the students change one structure to another. For example, the sentences (Johnson & Morrow, 1981)
Do you work here?
Are you working here?
may occur in the basic dialogue and dialogue variations. In a structure expansion exercise, the students could practice changing from one form to the other, using other verbs such as live, teach, study, etc.
In both kinds of expansion exercises, (Scott,1981) the students should observe all things they practiced in the preparation section: sentence stress, intonation, reduced words. In small classes, the teacher can give the cues and the students respond individually. In larger classes, the students can respond chorally in small groups.

Application

The final, and perhaps most important, section of a dialogue lesson involves application. In this section the students are given four to six situations similar to the initial one and told to converse with each other, using anything that has occurred in the lesson. (Jeffery, 2010) These new situations should require the students to use things they practiced in the expansion section. In small classes, the students can work in pairs so that all students have a chance to participate. In larger classes, several pairs of students can perform before the class and the

rest of the class can check for mistakes (Dubin & Olshtain, 1977)
Example of the dialogue practice.

Situation

A Thai (A) wants to know where a foreigner (B) comes from. He especially wants to know the particular part of the country or the particular city the foreigner comes from. (Littlewood,1981)

Preparation

Exercise 1: Intonation
Indicate the intonation in the parentheses.
Exercise 2: Sentence stress
Indicate the most important word (s) in the sentence.
Exercise 3: Reduced words
Indicate the words that are not pronounced with a "full" pronunciation.
Exercise 4: Incomplete sentences
Write out the incomplete sentences.

Conversation

Basic dialogue:
A.1 Where're you from ?
A.2 The United States.
A.3 What part of the United States?
A.4 The East.
Variation 1:
1.1 Where do you come from?
2.1 The U.S.
3.1 What state are you from ?
4.1 New York.
Variation 2:
1.2 Where were you born?
2.2 In the United States.
3.2 In which state?
4.2 New York State.
Variation 3:
1.3 What country are you from ?
2.3 The United States.
3.3 Where in the United States ?
4.3 The East New York States.

Expansion

Additional vocabulary
3.1 Which state are you from?
Province, prefecture, department, county, district, village, town, city

Application

Situation 1
The students speaks with a Japanese, He wants to know the details of where the Japanese is from. The Japanese is from Kanagawa Prefecture.
Situation 2
The student meets a Canadian. He wants to know the details of where the Canadian is from. The Canadian is from the province of Ontario.
Situation 3
The student wants to know where his friend's friend Tom comes from. To comes from California.

Situation 4
The student sees a new student in class. He wants to know the details of where the new student is from. The new student is from Haad Yai District in Songkhla.

Conclusion

The dialogue in a "conversation" class should be such that students can use it outside the classroom, if they have the opportunity and want to practice English. The activities in the classroom should be devoted to helping the student participate effectively in conversation rather than simply to making him repeat and memorize one dialogue after another. These activities may be of four kinds: preparation, conversation practice, expansion, and application. The method of dialogue presentation discussed here obviously includes a great deal of speaking on the part of the teacher. However, a lot of that speaking may be recorded, with or without pauses for student responses. In the vocabulary expansion part, for example, the cue can be given on multimedia, the students produce the required utterance, and then they listen to the correct response on the multimedia.

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