

## **Dialogic Teaching as a Way to Promote Students' English Language Use in EFL classroom**

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### **Abstract**

This study is classroom-based research in an English listening-speaking class at a Thai university. A dialogic teaching methodology was used in parts of the classroom tasks to encourage students to speak more English and build a learning community where they learn from each other and consider different voices. The purpose of this article is to analyze the dialogicality that emerged between students during the classroom activities and discuss students' reflections towards the classroom dialogic tasks. Students' conversations were recorded during the tasks that were designed to foster dialogicality. Excerpts of conversations were analyzed and revealed notable features of their dialogic interactions and how they could extend their vocabulary and language use. At the end of the semester, the students were interviewed in a focus group and individually. The interviews show the students' reflections which can be organized into four themes: 1) students enhance their knowledge through collaborative dialogues and collaborative group work, 2) students overcome their weaknesses, 3) learning by doing, and 4) positive challenges. The applications drawn from the results of this study enhance EFL classroom

instructional design and the classroom environment such that students are engaged with active participation.

*Keywords:* EFL classroom, dialogic teaching, dialogic talk, student voices, community of learning

## **Introduction**

Educational sectors around the globe are focusing on equipping students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which include, for example, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, reasoning, and cross-disciplinary skills. In foreign language classrooms, the challenge is how 21<sup>st</sup> century skills can be included along with the focus of the use of language. Teo (2019) suggests the adaptation of a dialogic approach to teaching as a pedagogy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The nature of dialogic teaching is to question and investigate, and this nature fosters the use of language from a perspective that goes beyond the monologic classroom.

A monologic stance does not only refer to teacher-oriented talk, but also includes talk where a teacher mainly asks questions that draw out restricted answers or gives fewer opportunities for students to voice out their opinions. In the foreign language classroom, this type of talk also means the limited use of language. Although there has been a trend to position students as the center of the EFL classroom, a monologic stance is still widely seen in classrooms evidenced by the trend towards English as a medium of instruction (EMI) throughout Asia. A recent study of teacher talk in an EFL classroom reveals teacher talk and practices restricting students from having higher quality talk such as self-elaboration, immediate form-focused feedback, rejection of students' initiative, immediate explicit positive assessment, and limited wait time (Pourhaji & Sadeghi, 2021). From the perspective of students, Rungwarapong (2019) reports factors that discourage students from participating in dialogic talk which includes the perception that the teacher is the sole source of knowledge. Classroom environments need to be designed in a way that elicits student interaction, and makes them feel they can also be

a knowledge contributor. Instructors also need to provide students with opportunities to engage in quality talk.

Given this need to address student-centered teaching, this article reports on classroom observation and students' reflections from an English classroom that implemented a dialogic teaching methodology in a Thai university. In English listening and speaking classes where the study was undertaken, even though the class content may be the same, teachers have the liberty to choose teaching strategies they prefer. For the class discussed in the present study, a balance was struck between drilled listening practices for the exam and engaging students in speaking activities. Dialogic teaching was not implemented for the entirety of the course, but rather in parts of some class activities. This approach sought to encourage students to use their prior knowledge of language, expand their language use and discover new knowledge from other students. Dialogic teaching was found to foster more conversations between the instructor and students as well as among students themselves. Through some specific questions that were given in the tasks, the students had to work both on their critical thinking skills and English language skills through classroom conversations. In implementing dialogic teaching Alexander's (2006) five dialogic teaching principles were operationalized in order to consider the varieties of dialogic teaching.

## **Literature Review**

### **Dialogic teaching**

Dialogic teaching has emerged as a method of teaching that confronts the monologic discourse common in standard language textbooks, or classrooms where instructors have an authoritarian role transferring knowledge. Through dialogic teaching, knowledge is built up as a variant set as opposed to a single absolute truth from an authority (Matusov, 2009). The role of an instructor who uses this method is not to rule the class but rather to facilitate learning for students and engage students in learning activities (Sewell, 2011; Teo, 2013).

Bakhtin (1981) defines dialogism as any utterance that is in dialogue whether spoken or written as a means of communication. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism emphasizes that in dialogue there is not merely one voice represented per speaker, but instead speakers' voices represent a number of voices that are embedded with different and sometimes conflicting ideologies. Dialogism is opposed to monologism emphasizing that "voice" in dialogue is not simply a conversation between two people. Rather voice is a conversation that would create *internally persuasive discourse* (Bakhtin, 1981) where speakers investigate the message, and help each other develop an open and meaningful conversation, rather than a controlled conversation that leads to predictable answers. In *internally persuasive discourse*, students have more opportunities to develop new perspectives on topics discussed, consider alternative points of view, and develop new knowledge through dialogic interaction.

However, dialogic teaching is not just organizing any talk where instructors and students, or students and students, exchange their utterances. The dialogue should involve a more purposeful conversation which stimulates students' interactions and challenges their thoughts. To apply dialogic teaching in a classroom, one should also establish a classroom environment and tasks that support the use of such an approach. Alexander (2006) proposed five dialogic classroom principals suggesting that classes should be as follows: collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful. In a collective dialogic classroom teachers and students approach learning tasks together, possibly in a group but most importantly not in isolation. Reciprocal dialogism in the classroom is where teachers and students effectively share their respective "voices" in a dialogic manner, enabling them to share ideas and reflect upon viewpoints that may not be their own. Supportive classroom dialogicality is where students are free to express their ideas, cultivating a classroom atmosphere where students are not afraid or embarrassed about having incorrect answers, helping one another maintain and develop a mutually agreed upon understanding. Cumulative dialogic classroom principals entail students and instructors building upon

their own as well as other students' ideas, thus creating a sense of dialogic inquiry in the classroom. Lastly purposeful dialogism in the classroom involves teachers actively planning for dialogic teaching with specific ends in mind.

### **Dialogic teaching in English as a foreign language (EFL) context**

A number of research studies have shown positive outcomes in content-based classrooms through implementing a dialogic teaching methodology (Adler et al., 2003; Choi et al., 2014; Lee, 2016; Mercer et al., 2009; Sewell, 2011; Teo, 2013). Dialogic teaching can also be applied in foreign language classrooms where the focus of the class is developing language skills. Through dialogic teaching students are afforded opportunities to learn and improve their foreign language skills through collaborative dialogues and group work (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014; Doukmak, 2014; Gupta & Lee, 2015; Shea, 2018).

While it seems to be the case that dialogic teaching has not received much recent analytical attention in the field of ELT, it has received more attention in the larger domain of education research in general (Alexander, 2020). Indeed, several studies note how this approach to teaching offers teachers a formidable pedagogical apparatus with which to engage students (García-Carrión et al., 2020). However, Howe et al. (2019) note that since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a dramatic shift in approaches to teacher-student dialogue. Their findings note that productive dialogue includes elaborated, querying, and student participation. Other more recent approaches to dialogic teaching have noted its effectiveness in relation to interactive classroom technologies, for example interactive whiteboards (Haneda et al., 2017). Additionally, some have noted differences in student performance, including differences between classroom subject (e.g., chemistry and language arts), with regards to the quality of educational dialogue (Muhonen et al., 2018). Forms of dialogic pedagogy have also been noted to be effective and productive in primary school classrooms among young learners (Vrikki et al., 2019). One possible reason for the lack of recent analytical attention

to dialogic pedagogies in ELT and applied linguistics in general is perhaps due to recent trends towards so-called “trans” approaches, for example translanguaging and translingual practices which are codes for aspects of Bakhtin’s dialogism in their theoretical epistemologies (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Daniel et al., 2019; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Pennycook, 2016; Wei, 2018).

Positive outcomes have been reported from dialogic teaching in EFL classrooms. Lin and Luk (2005) carried out research in a Hong Kong school where, even though English is a language used for wider communication in Hong Kong and is an important language in its education system, children of working-class Cantonese speakers still perceived English as a “foreign language.” However, teachers who engaged students in collaborative dialogues, facilitated creativity and encouraged students to speak English, which had the effect of producing students who understood new vocabulary and who were able to minimize the distance between themselves and English. Likewise, Barekat and Mohammadi (2014) reported that dialogic teaching could help improve students’ English speaking skills and proposed 21 key rules for dialogic discourse patterns which were applied in a high school English classroom in Iran. Moreover, Choi et al. (2014) conducted a study in a Korean university classroom where English was used as a medium of instruction and found that classes that implemented interactive dialogues, where they used authentic questions in a flexible environment enhanced students’ communicative skills and that students when in these classes felt less worried about their language skill and focused more on meaning making. However, Shea (2018) adopted dialogic teaching in an advanced EFL academic class in Japan and both positive aspects and constraints were reported. On the positive side, the teacher was able to elicit students’ ideas and generate quality talk in the classroom. The constraints identified in Shea’s (2018) dialogic classroom were related to the complexity in organizing the talk. Some students struggled when they had to talk, and the teacher sometimes was not able to engage them in talk effectively. However, such studies

illustrate the potential for dialogic pedagogy in English language classrooms.

In Thailand's EFL classroom context, investigations into dialogic pedagogy are still limited. One popular approach used to generate talk in classrooms is task-based teaching. Indeed, it is hard not to link task-based teaching which is student-oriented and features collaborative group work with dialogic teaching. Classroom tasks need to be well-designed in order to foster students' talk, encourage language use and equip students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Classroom activities in this study were created in the belief that language classrooms should allow students to learn and practice language through actual communication in authentic contexts (Wong, 2006), and encourage students to listen to other opinions while considering alternative perspectives (Gillies, 2016). Dialogic teaching is important in the way that it generates a variety of voices and perspectives (Lampert, 2001; Morson, 2004) which is important in language classrooms because they allow students to question others as well as discover or construct new knowledge on their own. Indeed, good dialogue enables students to learn from each other and for teachers to learn from their students. The knowledge that is displayed and shared does not necessarily have to be from the teacher, or from students who are more linguistically skillful than others, but knowledge can emerge from anyone in the class. Along similar lines, Swain (2000) uses the term collaborative dialogue to refer to, "*dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building*" (p.103). Problem solving tasks can also contribute to spontaneous responses beyond the classroom (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002). In foreign language classrooms, the problems that students have with using collaborative dialogue are language-based. Collaborative dialogue allows them to solve problems and learn language from their peers at the same time. As students are using English to communicate in a more authentic context, they learn the process of producing and using their language. Once they remember the process of constructing knowledge, they can apply it to new contexts outside of the classroom (Wong, 2006). In Thailand where

English is not uniformly present in students' everyday lives but is still an important language for students' future careers, the language classroom should be a place where students practice and extend their language use. Dialogic teaching is one means to accomplish that for Thai students.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative approach was implemented in order to operationalize dialogic pedagogy. This approach included: audio recording classroom activities, a focus group interview, and individual interviews. The interviews sought to examine the affordances and constraints encountered by students from implementing a dialogic teaching methodology. Data triangulation (Robson, 2011) was implemented in order to obtain data from different "voices": interactive voices from dialogic teaching exercises, group voices from the focus group, and individual perspectives from individual interviews. The course was a basic listening and speaking class designed for students from all faculties. There are around 22 sections of the course open each semester. The class met twice a week for 90 minutes each session. The course materials included a course book for instructors to follow. At the end of the course all students were required to take a common final listening exam. Instructors were required to cover both the topics and language focus of the textbook, so that students could be familiar with the exam format and words or phrases they might encounter in the final exam. The students were also required to take a speaking exam in the middle and at the end of the semester.

### **Participants**

There were 21 Thai university students in the classroom during the audio recording. At the end of the course, 11 students volunteered to participate in both a focused group interview and an individual in-depth interview. The students ranged from years 2-4 and were from different faculties: commerce and accountancy, political sciences, and journalism and communication. English is



neither their mother tongue nor the language used as a medium of instruction at their respective faculties. As such their different backgrounds and histories of English created a part of the dialogism that made up the classroom.

### **Procedure**

One classroom activity was chosen as a model of dialogic teaching in this study. Conversations between students, as well as conversations between students and the instructor were recorded during the activity. This activity will be referred to as the *Roi Thai activity* throughout the paper. This activity sought to develop dialogicality in student-student talk as well as instructor-student talk. To create this kind of discourse, an instructor had to engage students in a dialogic inquiry where students were asked open-ended questions and questions that enabled them to consider alternative views. Nystrand et al. (2003) refers to this kind of question as an authentic question, which is a question not requiring a specific answer and which is open for student's ideas. Students were encouraged to produce utterances that they actually meant to say, not scripted monologic utterances like those found in textbooks. At the same time through collaborative dialogues, they had opportunities to stretch their language use (Swain, 2000). The students were encouraged to go beyond their current language level and notice what they did not know. This approach aimed to create a degree of agency and metalinguistic awareness among students.

The task in the study was designed to meet Alexander's (2006) dialogic classroom principles. Table 1 notes how Alexander's principles were implemented in this study.

**Table 1**

How Alexander's 2006 Dialogic Classroom Principles Were Implemented

| <b>Principle</b> | <b>Implementation</b>  |
|------------------|--|
| Collective       | Have the students work in groups   |
| Reciprocal       | The students were provided with a list of questions to talk about.<br>The instructor observed and joined the talk.   |
| Supportive       | The students were encouraged to express their ideas freely without having to worry about grammar. They were asked to speak English as much as possible and speak Thai if they found themselves really struggling. They were told to raise their hand to ask about vocabulary none of the group members knew. The instructor would not correct their language right away, but rather selected some errors from her observations and presented them to the whole class at the end. |
| Cumulative       | The tasks allowed the students and instructor to ask more questions if necessary.  |
| Purposeful       | The tasks were designed for the students to extend their English language use with authentic questions in a flexible classroom environment.  |

This activity involved three phases:

### 1. Warm-up

Students were given a list of questions in order to engage them in a continuous conversation and periodically the instructor joined in. The instructor began with a question that required a short response such as “can you cook?” and “who cooks in your family?” Low complexity questions that require short responses were used.

### 2. Group talk

To extend the students’ language use, the instructor gave them tasks that provoke more questions. First, the instructor had students watch two commercial advertisements of *Roi Thai*, a brand of

pasteurized Thai curry with coconut milk, and gave them another list of questions in order to engage students in designing their own dialogues as they analyse the content of the commercials, express their thoughts and give reasons. The questions used in this phase were authentic questions that required longer answers which are reflective of the twenty-one key rules of dialogic discourse patterns (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014):

- Who is the target group of this product?
- How are women and men portrayed in the commercials?
- How are women portrayed in the commercials?
- Is *sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก) important to keeping family relationship?

### 3. Production

The last phase of this activity is where students created their own product and performed their own version of an advertisement for people who are not good at cooking. This part they brainstormed and negotiated among themselves to come up with a final cooking product and advertisement for presentation in a role play activity.

### **Findings**

This section presents five conversation excerpts from the data collected during a classroom activity. The data indicated that the students extended their conversation by asking their peers more questions, used some Thai words to maintain their speech flow, and helped one another with words that their peers could not say in English.

### **Interaction Data**

Excerpt 1 is an example of interaction among three students that emerged from dialogic teaching in this classroom. Some notable features of the emergent talk include the use of questions between students for clarification and the use of Thai language during the warm-up phase. Names used in the excerpt are pseudonyms.

## Excerpt 1

1. Sam: And Paul, who cook in your family?
2. Paul: My mother used to cook in my family. But now she no more cooking.
3. Jenny: Why?
4. Paul: She is very busy. Some time when I stay alone, I have to cook myself and ...bad *ah*<sup>1</sup> (อ๊ะ).
5. Jon: Dog can eat *mai*<sup>2</sup> (มี๊ย)?
6. Paul: Dog can, but I can't. [laughed]

The interaction above shows that the students asked questions to clarify their peers' statements: "why?" in line 3, "Dog can eat *mai*<sup>2</sup>?" in line 5.

The question "Dog can eat *mai*<sup>2</sup>?" in line 5 is an instance of translanguaging (Wei 2018) which entailed emergent localized behavior and meanings. "Dog can eat *mai*<sup>2</sup>?" is a play on a Thai idiom *ma mai daek* (หมาไม่แ่ก) which means dogs do not eat. People say that when your food is so bad that even dogs, which seem to eat anything they are fed, do not want to eat it. The student in Line 5 was joking with his classmate by asking if his cooking was good enough for a dog to eat. Then the student in Line 6's answer implied that his cooking was not good enough for him to eat but probably a dog can eat it.

With a set of low complexity questions in the first phase, students are scaffolded to build up their dialogues. Although there were some language errors, the use of Thai and translanguaging in parts of the conversation mitigated them. The students had gone through the process of learning to make an English conversation and had created internally persuasive discourse where English does not suppress their own voices.

Excerpt 2 is an interaction among three students from another group working in a group on the second phase of the class activities where analytical open-ended questions were adopted. They were

<sup>1</sup> *Ah* in this line is a particle. It does not indicate any special meaning but indicates informal tone of speaking.

<sup>2</sup> *Mai* indicates a yes/no question. In this case, *mai* is used instead of the modal verb "can".

discussing whether *sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก) is important to maintaining family relationships.

*Sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก) is a Thai saying which literally translates as the charm at the ladle. This saying is used to describe a woman who is good at cooking. A close equivalent in English could be “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” The commercial used this saying to show that their instant curry product could help women to earn this charm. The following excerpt shows how the students responded and worked as a group to analyse the message from the commercials.

#### Excerpt 2

1. Kylie: According to the video I think it’s important.
2. Lynn: I think it’s important too. I agree with you.
3. Sean: I think it’s a part of important because you don’t have to cook nowadays because we can eat outside.
4. Lynn: [laugh] But I think...
5. Sean: But it’s good to have *sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก)
6. Lynn: Because the man will come back home and eat.
7. Kylie: [laugh]
8. Lynn: Like in many dramas. I can’t even imagine myself do
9. Kylie: something like that.
10. Lynn: Why *ah* (อะ)?  
I can’t even eat what I make, what I cooking.
11. Kylie: I can *tam nam phrik na*<sup>3</sup> (ตำน้ำพริกนะ Trans: pound chili paste)
12. Lynn: *Tam nam phrik* (ตำน้ำพริก Trans: pound chili paste), I can make a paste, *chai pa*<sup>4</sup> (ใช่ปะ Trans: correct or not?) *tam nam phrik* (ตำน้ำพริก Trans: pound chili paste)
13. Sean: *Euh*<sup>5</sup> (เออ), chili paste.

<sup>3</sup> *Na* is a particle often used at the end of a sentence to indicate, in this case, politeness.

<sup>4</sup> *Pa* is a short form of the phrase *rue plao* which means “or not”.

<sup>5</sup> *Euh* is an interjection, in this case, meaning “yes”.

The conversation in excerpt 2 shows that the students contribute knowledge in their community of learning where they shared their ideas and tested the ideas of others. The students Kylie and Lynn in Lines 1–2 think *sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก) is important to keeping family relationship based on the context in the commercial. While Sean in Line 3 points out a more realistic and practical way that a family can go eating out. We can see that they did not look for one absolute meaning or answer, rather they offered alternatives. There is no judgment or evaluation of their ideas, and this enabled students in the group to gain a wider world view.

It is also important to note that this task encouraged them to expand their language use through inquiring about ideas and vocabulary that they did not know, for instance, cultural related vocabulary in Lines 11–13. Kylie used Thai to replace a word that she did not know in English. Then Lynn in Line 12, used repetition of that Thai word helping her classmate make an English sentence. Sean in Line 17 completed the repair sequence by saying the English equivalent of a Thai word *nam phrik* (น้ำพริก) which is chili paste.

Excerpts 1 and 2 show that sets of questions that are both low-complexity and analytical open-ended, can scaffold students to build up their own dialogue and develop their own voices. This task also enabled students to foster internally persuasive discourse as they were developing their dialogue by investigating and responding to one another's messages which shows that their voices were not suppressed by a language obstacle.

Excerpt 3 below is an interaction between the instructor and students.

#### Excerpt 3

1. Instructor: Do you agree *sanay plai jawak* (เสน่ห์ปลายจวัก) is important to keeping the family relationship?
2. Sam: Yes, I agree.
3. Instructor: What if you are not good at cooking?
4. Sam: Roi Thai for me
5. Paul: Roi Thai, anyone cook is delicious.

6. Everyone: Ah! [laugh]
7. Jon: The advertisement show that men can cook too.
8. Instructor: Are you happy with this advertisement, as a guy?  
Would you buy this product?
9. Jon: No.
10. Instructor: It is still hard for you to get *Roi Thai*, and get it to the pot and boil it.
11. Jon: If I have a wife, I'll tell her to buy *Roi Thai* as seen in the advertisement.

In excerpt 3, the instructor started the conversation by asking the question given in the task in Line 1. Then answers of the students in this excerpt were short and the instructor had attempted to build up more conversation in Lines 3, 8, and 10.

In excerpt 4 below, the instructor asked for a volunteer to share their answer regarding the target audience in the advertisement to the class. The instructor extended the conversation and facilitated turn-taking. The student Sean said Gen Y and the instructor asked for more information.

#### Excerpt 4

1. Instructor: How old is Gen Y?  
Sean: Twenty
2. Instructor: So people who are in their twenties.
3. Sean: Gen Y who has just start a job and don't have time...
4. Sam: Sorry, Sean, you skipped that class that has the guest speaker who speak about *Roi Thai*. So, it's (his answer) wrong  
[class laughed]
5. Instructor: What was the guest speaker speak about *Roi Thai*?
6. Sam: The speaker said the target audience is a housewife who can cook, but she don't like to waste her time. And when she cook, she dress her hair. She go to salon. But if she cook in a typical way, her hair will smell bad. So if she has a *Roi Thai* she can have time.

Excerpts 3–4 present the role of the instructor that helped students extend the conversation. The instructor joined the

conversation by asking the given questions in the task and then by building up more conversation as much as possible. The students delivered clear and smooth utterances. There were some grammatical errors, but they were not major concerns. The instructor did not make any correction but tried to extend the conversation. The type of questions included both questions that require a short answer, for example, “How old is Gen Y?” in Line 1 and questions that require explanation, for example, “what was the guest speaker speak about Roi Thai” in Line 5.

Excerpt 5 below shows the conversation between the instructor and students. This time a lower proficiency student was asked to answer an analytic open-ended question.

#### Excerpt 5

1. Instructor: So what do you think? How are older and younger women presented Line 39 differently?
2. Paul: The older woman is like a original.
3. Jenny: Oh, that is my word.
4. Paul: And the next generation like mother, and *euh...*  
Jon: Daughter.
5. Paul: Daughter is like a new generation of cooking, like, *baeb wa* (แบบว่า trans: it is like) use Roi Thai for more easy.
6. Instructor: Ah, huh.
7. Paul: If, if the grandmother she *tam phik* (ตำพริก trans: pound chilies).
8. Jon: pound
9. Paul: pound chili and garlic *ah, arai ah* (อะ อะไรอะ trans: What about garlic? What to do with it?)
10. Group members: Peel garlic
11. Sam: *Lawk khawng took khon* (ลอกของทุกคน trans: You copied everyone.) [everybody laughed]
12. Instructor: Ah, OK, so grandmother is like an old-fashioned girl.
13. Paul: Yeah, the grandmother, but mother is like the new...generation use Roi Thai for easy.



14. Instructor: Easier and more convenient.

15. Paul: Yeah, teacher, let's stop. I'm losing my voice. [everybody laughed]

Excerpt 5 presents the roles of both the instructor and peers in scaffolding Paul who was not quite fluent in English. In excerpt 1 where the lower complexity questions were used, Paul seemed to handle the conversation with ease. In excerpt 5, however, Paul showed hesitation and the group members helped him construct his dialogue. This time the use of translanguaging is not for the purpose of humor as in excerpt 1, but to fill dialogic space with words he did not know, for example, peel and pound chilies. The instructor responded by summarizing his idea and introducing better vocabulary choices, for example, easier and more convenient. There was not any extended conversation because this student asked the instructor to stop. Excerpt 5 also shows that Paul did not take part in the earlier conversation before the instructor visited. This can be seen from the group members' responses in Line 3 "that is my word" and Line 11 "you copied everyone."

As seen from excerpts 1 and 3, Paul participated in the conversation at different levels. In excerpt 1 where the questions were more general, Paul was able to give spontaneous responses and even extend the conversation. In excerpt 3, Paul encountered some difficulty, but was able to respond to the unprepared question with the help of his peers. The question about the representation of women in the video requires higher linguistic and cognitive knowledge than the questions in the excerpt 1. He listened to his peers, summarized and delivered speech in his own way. What Paul achieved in this task was learning new vocabulary and using it, and most importantly, his voice was not suppressed or ignored. He received scaffolding both from his peers and the instructor. His peers helped him construct his utterance, and the instructor offered input of alternative vocabulary that he could use, for example, "old-fashioned" in Line 12 and "convenient" in Line 14. It is undeniable that analytical open-ended questions that require spontaneous responses were a challenge for

Paul. However, this did not discourage him from speaking English. During an interview Paul reflected upon how the class environment, peers, and instructor helped him overcome his fear of speaking English.

This section discussed data from classroom interaction from a dialogic pedagogy activity, *Roi Thai*, in which open-ended questions, teacher-student interaction, and peer scaffolding enabled students to have a voice. In the next section the results of individual interviews and interview data are discussed.

### **Interview Data**

The focused group interview and individual interviews were carried out at the end of the course to investigate the students' affordance and constraints of the dialogic methods used in the activity. The interview was open-ended and students were asked to talk about what they learned from the tasks and from their peers as well as challenges they encountered in the *Roi Thai* activity. The interviews were carried out in Thai and were analyzed thematically. Four themes emerged from this interview data and some interview excerpts: 1) students enhance their knowledge through collaborative dialogues and collaborative group work; 2) students overcome their weaknesses; 3) learning by doing; and 4) challenges.

### **Theme 1: Students Enhance their Knowledge through Collaborative Dialogues and Collaborative Group Work.**

The students built their learning community through dialogue. They reported using knowledge from their major, learning from others and considered different viewpoints. The following is an excerpt from a communication arts student who worked with peers from different faculties.

*We need to think that what we learn in class is practical in our real life. I told them about making an advertisement in case they have a chance to work in an advertising company. They have to know 30 seconds is enough. Otherwise the audience would be bored. – Joy*

The excerpt above shows that the task allowed room for students with different backgrounds to have their voices heard and take part in the conversations. Moreover, through engaging students in the discussion and collaborative group work, they also reported they exchanged knowledge and learned more from one another. They saw this class activity as an opportunity to consider different opinions to work collaboratively as noted in the following excerpt.

*We might think that our thought is right, but when we listen to others we know that other thoughts are also right. We are not alone in the society. Some time we need different thoughts to create new things.– Kayla*

The two interview excerpts above indicate that the EFL classroom is not just where students practice or learn language but can be what Watkins (2005) and Wong (2006) call a community of learners who build up new knowledge from doing something together. By building that knowledge through dialogicality in collaborative group work, the students considered alternative ideas from their peers and advanced their knowledge to complete their task. This can also be seen in the conversation in excerpt 2 discussed earlier where one can see that knowledge is not transmitted from an authority (e.g., an instructor or students from a particular major). Knowledge from an authority is knowledge without testing from others, and without critical questions. When an authority transfers a statement of knowledge and the learner only accepts it, they do not learn effectively, they only repeat the statement. Matusov (2009) likened this type of teaching from the voice of authority as a parrot repeating a statement.

## **Theme 2: Students Overcome their Weaknesses**

In the common Thai classroom where students do not necessarily have a “voice” in any sense, students are expected not to question their teacher or peers’ responses. Traditional Thai classrooms, where many of the students in the class under discussion spent their formative years, are largely monologic. The

dialogic pedagogy presented here serves as an example of how Thai students can be encouraged to use their own knowledge and intellectual resources in the language classroom, illustrating the importance of having a voice in the classroom. Dialogic pedagogy is one way that Thai students are able to overcome their speaking anxiety which may contain traces of their monologic classroom experiences. The interview and focus group data revealed that the task and classroom environment supported students' learning outcomes. Throughout the course, the instructor tried to rotate students into different groups to provide opportunities for them to work with and learn from a variety of people. The interviews showed two factors that helped students to overcome their anxiety of speaking English: supportive group work and focus on meaning in the classroom.

### **Supportive Group Work**

Working as a group, students could encourage their peers to speak as well as help each other to complete their tasks. This sense of encouragement and collaborative task completion are notable in the interview excerpt below.

[Speaking about rotating group talk] *My group is lively when we were with those enthusiastic classmates. I'm an enthusiastic person too. So we got along. Once we were in a group with a girl with glasses. She didn't speak a lot. But having her in our group was good. We could help her. – Jon*

This excerpt illustrates that working as a group, not only afforded students an opportunity to exchange knowledge as discussed earlier, but also gave them an opportunity to help each other build up conversations so that no one would be left out. This can also be seen in the conversation in excerpt 1 discussed earlier.

### **Focusing on Meaning in the Classroom**

A more flexible classroom interaction environment encouraged students to overcome their weaknesses. The data indicates that the

students were less worried when the classroom had a more communicative focus. Indeed, many students reported the class atmosphere was less stressful as the instructor did not strictly focus on grammar. Students were also allowed to occasionally use hybrid language or translanguaging to achieve their communicative goals.

*I don't like studying English. Since my first year, I'd been horrible. But when I was in this class, I spoke a lot. Sometimes it was fun to speak something. I don't know what I spoke out was nonsense or not, but I got to speak English in my own way. There was no pressure on me to be perfect. I got to bring out my potential in speaking English. – Paul*

This shows that the dialogic classroom, which has a supportive environment, provides space for students to produce English in such a manner that students produce a language of their own (Lin & Luk, 2005). They embrace English and to speak English is not beyond their ability. This can also be seen in the dialogues in excerpts 1 and 2. From the data above, it can be observed that the student used English in a less controlled and more natural setting through group talk. This is in line with Alexander's (2006) supportive classroom where students have no fear of wrong answers. This finding also corresponds with the findings of Choi et al. (2014) where the classroom environment was communicative encouraging students to express their ideas and the instructor did not strictly focus on grammatical errors.

### **Theme 3: Learning by Doing**

Learning by doing is one of Wong's (2006) features of dialogic pedagogy. The students learned by doing and learned from their mistakes. They were also able to practice describing and explaining something that they had never done in English before.

*She [the instructor] used other topics that engage us to learn the language; to learn how to communicate a particular thing in English instead of Thai. – Joy*

The above excerpt indicates how students learned English by using it in a less controlled classroom conversation. The activity required a spontaneous response to authentic questions. This shows that the activity helped the students stretch their language use in an actual and meaningful conversation. When students figured out the procedure and experience, in this case, they learned to explain and express their opinions in English. Students are likely to apply this learning strategy outside of the classroom or in different situations. As Wong (2006) explained once students figure out the process of problem solving, they will be able to apply it to new situations. In this case, students figured out how they would explain something in English. They were then able to test if their group understood what they had said, and learned what they did not know and how to overcome that.

#### **Theme 4: Challenges**

Discussions and collaborative work are both cognitively and linguistically demanding. At the beginning of this study, the intention was to examine how students reacted to a dialogic teaching methodology. However, what was found in the interview data were not constraints that would lead students to give up, but rather positive challenges that encouraged them to learn and persevere through a challenging learning encounter.

*[Speaking about doing a presentation after a groupwork] I did a lot of impromptu class presentations. Sometimes I got stuck and I felt a little disappointed. But I felt my improvisation skill has improved. When you feel you are getting better at improvisation, it means your English is better. – Rainy*

In the above excerpt, the student found her English speaking skills improved through a more natural setting where she had to produce dialogue without a prepared script. This could be a product of how she learned by doing and eventually figured out how she could speak English in various situations. The tasks which fostered dialogicality gave opportunities rather than obstacles. The students

were not treated as a parrot in a cage where they only received a transmission of knowledge and did not know how to use it outside of their “cage.”

Another challenge is the discussion of the cultural related vocabulary.

*Sometimes making spontaneous response when I lacked vocabulary was difficult. I had a reasonable answer in Thai in my head, but then I needed to deliver that in English. I took time. For example, when I had to talk about sanay plai jawak (สนับปลายจวัก), it took time for me to think about word choice. – Finn*

Finn was a low proficiency student in the class, and from the above interview excerpt informs the struggle that he had during the task. He further mentioned that the task which he enjoyed most was brainstorming to come up with a cooking product and preparing for the advertisement role play. This section analysed data from individual interviews and focus groups which asked students to reflect upon their experiences of learning through dialogic pedagogy.

## **Discussion**

The data shows students’ positive reflections on the dialogic teaching method that was implemented. Through collaborative dialogues and group work, the students learned not only language but also alternative viewpoints from their peers. They helped each other build knowledge and extended their English language use. It is also worthwhile mentioning some affordances and constraints that emerged through the implementation of this dialogic teaching method such as extended and authentic conversation. In the interviews, students noted that the classroom environment including the tasks, instructor’s scaffolding, and peer scaffolding all played an important role in learning the language.

The constraints lay in the level of the tasks. Analytic open-ended questions and authentic conversation can be linguistically and cognitively challenging for some students. The interview data reveals

that some students saw the difficulty of the tasks as a challenge to overcome; however, others like Paul struggled and asked the instructor to stop extending the conversation. Though his tone was humorous, his difficulties should not be overlooked. Lower proficiency students need to be carefully observed and scaffolded. Another challenge for the instructor was making effective impromptu questions and interaction to extend student conversation, giving them opportunities to learn and, most importantly, voice out their opinions.

### **Implications for Practice**

#### **Value their Voices**

A dialogic approach is more than just an expression of one's ideas and testing each other's ideas. To make dialogicality productive, students need to be in an environment that allows them to have a voice. This includes allowing them to express themselves in their mother tongues. Dialogicality will build up internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) in the classroom where the students' voices are not oppressed, and they overcome their fear of expressing their views. Thus, they are valued as a person who constructs knowledge and is a contributor to their learning community.

#### **Roles of the Instructor**

To build a community of learners requires not only the contribution of students but also the instructor (Sewell, 2011; Teo, 2013). The instructor should be purposeful in designing tasks to create an environment that allows students to overcome their language anxieties. The role of an instructor in the classroom must not be an authoritative person who takes all control over what and how students would learn, but a person who helps the students reach their potential, assists their needs, and is open to alternatives.

#### **Task Design**

Authentic questions and a less controlled environment seem to play an important role in classrooms where dialogic teaching is implemented (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014). As discussed earlier,



dialogue in the classroom should not be autocratic in the sense that conversations are rigidly controlled or conversations have predictable answers. Rather, one should design tasks with questions that elicit students' use of previous knowledge. Open-ended questions allow for different ideas and alternative opinions, i.e., they include the many voices that make up a Thai classroom.

Types of activities should be balanced and come with appropriate scaffolding. Dialogic teaching and open-ended questions can foster students' talk, but some low English proficiency students might struggle to the point that they can manage only very little participation, as with Paul's Excerpt 3. Insertion of low complexity tasks such as short-answer questions, or prepared role-plays or presentations could give students a break from long extended talk, as exemplified by Film in the interview.

### **Flexibility**

In an EFL context where not every student might be able to express their viewpoints in English very well, there are some difficulties in implementing a dialogic approach: 1) the students are afraid that their English is not correct, and 2) the students do not know how to express something in English so only speak words that they already know which might not fully reflect their thought, give a short response, or avoid participating in group talk. To successfully create a dialogic discourse in such a classroom, instructors should build an environment where the students feel at ease speaking English. At the same time, instructors should not neglect the objective of their language classroom. To that end, the instructor in this study corrected grammar or vocabulary as necessary rather than intervening in students' conversations to correct their language.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

A limitation of this study is the number of students and time constraints. The instructor had to move from one group to another in order to observe the whole class engaging in dialogic activity. When their conversation bogged down, the instructor might not have been

able to intervene to help keep the conversation going because she was working with another group. However, conversation excerpts presented earlier reveal that the use of Thai vocabulary as a filler in the conversation was an affordance for students enabling them to keep their conversations going. The students could also ask the instructor for any vocabulary they do not know. Their use of hybrid language/translanguaging, English and Thai, was also understood by their peers. In a multilingual classroom, this situation could be different and would need further study of affordances, constraints and how students from different cultural and language backgrounds negotiate meanings.

Another area that needs further study is evaluation. As students used translanguaging during their conversations and focused on meaning and communicative goals rather than form, focused on accuracy may not be appropriate for classes implementing a dialogic approach.

### **Conclusion**

This study should be of interest to who are considering using dialogic teaching in their classrooms. The outcome of this classroom research supports the use of discussion and dialogue in the classroom. However, this approach can be challenging for students with lower English proficiency for although dialogic tasks gave them opportunities to talk and learn, they should also be scaffolded appropriately. Textbooks are still useful in the way that they provide instructors with topics to be covered and some ideas for their classes. However, to create an environment and activities that better support students' language learning, instructors should reconsider how to make best use of both textbooks and speaking evaluations. Implementing dialogic teaching in EFL speaking classes may offer opportunities for students to extend their language use and overcome their anxiety about speaking English. Dialogic teaching allows the many voices of a diverse range of students to engage in classroom interaction, creating a community of learners where students help each other build up knowledge, learn from each other and become

autonomous learners who are not restricted by textbook activities or their English language skills.

### About the Author

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