Teachers' roles in Russian Language Teaching

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Abstract: The theory of teaching has been developing at the same time. Teacher's role is not the same as in traditional Russian Language Teaching(RLT) , which often means "transmitting knowledge to the class" according to Scrivener (2011, p.14). This essay will firstly introduce and compare the classifications of teachers' roles put forward by Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011). Then several classifications made to justify the choice by referring to the weekly video observation. At last, the author will comment on and compare the use of these roles in Russian for Academic Purpose (RAP) and General Russian (GR) classroom.

1. Introduction

Believing that it is more comprehensible to categorize roles played by teachers in RLT rather than only judge the effectiveness of teachers' fulfilment as a *facilitator*, Harmer (2007) classified teachers' roles into five categories:

The first one is *controller,* which means teachers are "in charge of the class and of the activity taking place" (Harmer, 2007, p. 108). Acting as *controller* has been considered as "the most common teacher role" (Harmer, 2007, p. 109).

The second role is *prompter*. Teachers usually play this role through offering some tips or giving important clues when students encounter difficulties in both individual and group work. Harmer (2011) also argued that teachers should pay attention to the extent of providing help.

In the third place, teachers could be *participant*. Harmer (2011) proposed a new idea that teachers can participate in students' activities as well as a partner. The rationale for teachers to join in an activity is that it "can liven things up from the inside" (Harmer, 2007, p. 109) and both the teacher and the students may enjoy this participation if it goes well.

In the fourth place, teachers could act as *resource* when it is inappropriate for them to interfere in students' activity. Nevertheless, there are two things worth being mentioned in terms of providing information to students as resource. The first one is teachers should have the courage to say "I don't know the answer to that right now" (Harmer, 2007, p. 110). Another one is that if they know the answers, it is better to guiding students to find relevant information instead of telling every answer directly. All in all, teachers should encourage students to become more independent and avoid over-reliance.

The last role played by teachers is tutor, which combines "the roles of prompter and resource" (Harmer, 2011, p. 110). Though it is difficult to act as a tutor in a large group, teachers could create opportunities to point out students' insufficiency when they work in small groups or in pairs, for example. Besides, teachers have to make sure as far as possible that every individual or group is

given equal attention, otherwise students who are paid less attention may feel despised in the class.Differently from Harmer, Scrivener (2011) categorized teacher's role broadly into three types: the explainer, the involver and the enabler.

2. Comparison and contrast

Both Harmer and Scrivener classified teachers' roles into three levels: basic, more advanced and comprehensive. Since Harmer (2007) defined the controller as "the most common teacher role" (2007, p. 109), thus it lies in the basic level. At the second level, the prompter, participant and the resource can provide help to students while maintaining a proper control to the whole class. The tutor, who combines the prompter and the resource together, obviously situates in the comprehensive level. In the eyes of Scrivener (2011), differences have been made among the explainer, the involver and the enabler which are based on their knowledge of "subject matter, methodology and people" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 18). To be more specifically, the explainer knows only subject matter, the involver understands both subject matter and methodology and the enabler can master all the three factors. As their knowledge growing, teachers can go up to another level. In addition, Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011) proposed similar roles in their classification. The explainer plays a similar role with the controller since they all describe the basic teachers' role in RLT classes. Both tutor and the enabler mean creating an environment which facilitates students' independent learning.

In terms of differences, first of all, Harmer's (2007) categorized teachers' roles more dialectically than Scrivener (2011). Harmer (2007) described both advantages and disadvantages of every role, whilst Scrivener (2011) only gave explanation to the three roles and compared them in the end. Secondly, teachers can combine different roles from Harmer's (2007) classification in the class, like adopting controller and prompter together, while from the perspective of Scrivener (2011), it seems that a teacher can play only one role in the class, because it is redundant to combine the explainer, the involver and the enabler with each other.

3. Harmer VS. Scrivener

As stated by Scrivener (2011) himself, it is an impossible task to classify all teachers' roles into three categories, so his description of these three kinds of teachers is "broadly painted" (2011, p.18), while Harmer (2007) put teachers' roles into five categories making his classification more systematic and comprehensive. Considering from this perspective which will be illustrated in detail in the following paragraphs, Harmer's (2007) classification is more appropriate than the one of Scrivener (2011).

Harmer's (2007) classification covers more aspects of teachers' roles taking place in the classroom. In Scrivener's classification, only three factors are included: explaining subject matters to the class, conducting activities to get students involved and knowing students' reaction to the teaching. "Giving explanations" and "organize drills" (Harmer, 2007, p.108-109) etc. show that the controller knows both how to explain subject matters and conduct activities.

In addition, Harmer (2007) has used a dialectic method to categorize teachers' roles, while Scrivener (2011) has adopted an explanatory way to classify teachers. Harmer (2007) always compares the merits and defects of the roles and gives advice on to what extent teachers should play those roles. Scrivener (2011) did not give much space to discuss both advantages and disadvantages, e.g. there is no disadvantage can be seen in the description of the enabler.

4. Controller and Tutor: the most common roles in RLT classes.

As Harmer (2007) mentioned, teachers act as a controller most frequently in RLT classes. In the

class of Mehta, this role can be observed quite clearly.

Taking charge of the activities carried out in the classroom is another character of being a controller. One example to illustrate that is after giving instruction and releasing handouts to students, Mehta asks students to read the examples on the paper:

Mehta: Ok. Erico, do you want to start number 1? Just read out number 1, please. Number 1, language review.

Erico reads the sentence.

Mehta: Ok, thank you! Henric, do you want to read number 2? Henric reads the sentence

Mehta: Ok, thank you!

The above transcript shows that Mehta has a strong control of the activity taking place in the classroom.

Tutor is another role which is often played by teachers in RLT classes. In Andrew's class, this role can be observed quite clearly.

As mentioned previously, tutor combines the roles of prompter and resource and is often carried out when students "work in small groups or in pairs" (Harmer, 2007, p. 110). Andrew has done exactly what includes in the definition of tutor.

5. Teacher's roles in GR and RAP classes

In order to compare the use of Harmer's (2007) roles in GR and RAP classes, the definition of GR and RAP courses should be understood first. According to Scrivener (2011, p. 315), the main aim of RAP courses is preparing students to grasp "language and skills" for their further academic studies,

e.g. "essay writing, making presentation or using references". GR courses mainly focus on teaching students the language they may need in the future through introducing a number of "general interest topics" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 328-329).

In this case, teachers often join in students and make conversation with them. Here is a conversation extracted from Eliana's class, which shows clearly that she was participating in students' activity:

Eliana: When would you go to a restaurant? Everyday? Student A: No, special day.

Eliana: what type of day is special? Birthdays? Student B: Valentire's day

Eliana: Va-len-tine's day? Student B: Valentine's day.

In many cases, when teachers act as a tutor, they aim to creating a virtual academic world for students. Andrew can be considered as good example for doing this. When students told each other some behaviors of a particular culture, it was like a seminar in university. In the real academic world, instead of telling answers directly professors often give students guidance and encourage them to do individual or group research.

6. Conclusion

This essay has briefly introduced and compared teachers' roles of Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011) and the author believes that Harmer's classification is more comprehensive and dialect than the one of Scrivener. As for commenting on the application of Harmer's (2007) roles in GE and RAP classes, a conclusion could be reached that out of different purposes teachers may tend to play some roles more frequently than others. Understanding what the roles mean and what is the proper time to employ them is quite useful for teachers to achieve their goals in the RLT classes.

References

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