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CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL LANGUAGE *CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL INCIDENTS*

The aim of this text is to systematize what is generally approached intuitively by teachers, namely their students' position with regard to spoken language in the classroom. To this end, students' utterances are considered through the position of David Tripp's theory of critical incidents (their analysis and construction), which are juxtaposed against four educational domains as outlined by Boleslaw Niemierko. Thereby, analytical means are developed for teachers to recognise what role their students assign to the use of language and what prevents them from speaking out loud, and to build upon this awareness by helping students cross the boundary thus discovered. Hence, the main objective here is to postulate construction of such educational incidents that will be personally significant to students by marking an important step in their classroom use of (any) language.

1. Utterance as an educational breakthrough

A student's use of language – regardless of the school subject or discipline – marks a significant demarcation line in his or her education. On the whole, the situations of students expressing ideas, thoughts or views are highly desirable as implying that given students have made sufficient progress to reach beyond earlier stages of being spoken to. This subsequentness and desirability of students' speech tends to (and should) be the object of (not only language) teachers' strivings to help students advance (a) on the level of language skills – from reception to production, (b) on the diagnostic level – from latent competence (i.e. hidden knowledge, not articulated by students) to observable abilities (e.g. verbal presentations by students vocalizing their interpretation of particular subject matter)¹, (c) on the level of overall school performance – from passive participation (i.e. students remaining quiet so that the teachers and the peers have no choice but guess what the wordless individuals think and what they know) to active involvement (as students whose ideas, level of expertise in school subjects etc. are known to the "school public"). There are numerous arguments supporting the claim that reaching the stage of language production, latent competence and/or active language-based performance is or should be one of the main goals of education of any school subject,, with the most obvious one being that it is speech that in many a walk of life that opens people's gate to success.

This being the case, **a student's first utterance on any given issue bears the features of the so-called *critical incidents* ('CI')**, either as non-technically understood turning points or as defined by David Tripp as quite ordinary events, the critical character of which consists in that they reflect the motifs or structures underlying them (cf. Tripp 1996: 45), unravelling what is earlier, deeper. Thanks to a systematic approach to such commonplace occurrences as proposed by Tripp, teachers can recognise

¹ The relationship between the latent and the observable and its implications for education have been addressed by the author in several other texts concerning students' utterances on learning (2007:33), expression of knowledge (2015:104) and classroom diagnostics (2016:218).

in what sense they do become turning points, as a result of which there appear significant changes to teachers’ understanding of their character and their significance for further work with students.

The above implies **the possibility of approaching the issue of student utterances by rationale and means applicable to critical incidents**, which unravels the option of utterance-oriented critical educational incidents construction. Tripp presents the process of critical incident construction as aimed at recognition of hidden meanings of events, which is uncovered through their thorough description (first stage) and systematic analysis (second stage, based on four types of judgement – practical, diagnostic, reflective and critical) (cf. ibidem: 45, 47). Application of the very same two-stage approach to student utterances results in our key premise that *for the said boundary to be crossed and for a student’s (own) utterance to be formulated, an analysis is required for possible underlying obstacles to speech to be detected and overcome.*

Hence, if we apply Tripp’s rationale to student utterances, the first stage of the construction of critical incidents will consist primarily in recognition of (the character of) the boundary which needs to be crossed for students to utter particular subject matter, and its second stage – in consideration of what must be performed for students to cross that boundary.

Table 1. Two stages of language critical incidents construction.

| First stage of utterance-oriented CI construction | Second stage of utterance-oriented CI construction |
|---|--|
| recognizing the boundary | crossing the boundary |

The boundary in question may vary greatly, meaning that **students may happen (or choose) not to articulate subject matter for a number of reasons** (or, in other words, what lies “under” or “before” the boundary may be of completely different nature). Specifically, students may happen (or choose) not to speak because, for example, they lack knowledge, they fear their teachers’ or peers’ reactions, they have not learnt to pronounce things properly, or they simply consider speaking about given issues to be pointless. Each of these four causes pertains to different educational domains and calls for different measures on the part of the teacher. What they have in common, though, is that they all may be viewed to fall under (or before) the said boundary which students must cross before they voluntarily speak.

In the four instances cited, the students’ reasons for not speaking pertain to different educational spheres, that is to the students’ cognition, emotions, physical skills and their worldview, respectively. Considering this point from the perspective of the four taxonomies of educational objectives as systematized by Niemierko (e.g. Niemierko 2002: 48) following much earlier well known publications on the formation and use of taxonomies in education (primarily Bloom 1956, and Krathwohl 1963), it is a student’s voluntary utterance that clearly marks the boundary between (implicit) knowledge and (imitative) actions, on the one hand, and (explicit) abilities and (personalised) attitudes, on the other hand. Specifically²,

Table 2. Significance of students’ unforced utterances across educational domains

² The text in bold type forms four complete sentences, which can be read separately from the remaining content.

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| in the affective domain | <p style="text-align: center;">a student's unforced utterances demonstrate that s/he</p> | has moved from <i>Level I: Actions</i> comprised of <i>Category A: Participation in actions & Category B: Undertaking actions</i>) up to <i>Level II: Attitudes</i> and so s/he has an internal need to speak (<i>Category C: Inclination to act, prior to Category D: System of actions</i>) |
| in the worldview domain | | has moved from <i>Level I: Knowledge</i> comprised of <i>Category A: Belief in the truthfulness of knowledge & Category B: Belief in the value of knowledge</i>) up to <i>Level II: Attitudes</i> and so s/he has an inclination to speak (<i>Category C: Inclination to apply knowledge, prior to Category D: System of knowledge applications</i>) |
| in the psychomotor domain | | has moved from <i>Level I: Actions</i> comprised of <i>Category A: Imitation of actions & Category B: Repetition of actions</i>) up to <i>Level II: Abilities</i> and so s/he can formulate utterances in familiar contexts (<i>Category C: Ability to act in steady conditions, prior to Category D: Ability to act in changeable conditions</i>) |
| in the cognitive domain | | has moved from <i>Level I: Knowledge</i> comprised of <i>Category A: Remembering & Category B: Comprehension</i>) up to <i>Level II: Abilities</i> and so s/he can speak on familiar issues (<i>Category C: Application of knowledge in typical situations, prior to Category D: Application of knowledge in atypical situations</i>) |

Hence, a student's unforced utterances mark educational BREAKTHROUGHS in the form of shifts of a higher order, from the lower to higher taxonomical level (from Category B to Category C) and so – owing to their momentous character and status of a breakthrough – they constitute what we may refer to as *critical language educational incidents*, whilst those shifts in language progress which are less radical (or “loud”) in their nature (i.e. either those before a student speaks of his or her own will or those after it has happened for the very first time) can be referred to as simply *language educational incidents*, entailing a shift from a lower to higher taxonomical category.

Lower-order changes – providing that they do happen in a linear form, which is assumed in this text – remain less radical in not being subject to direct registration. In the realm of students' utterances, such less prominent progress will mean:

- In the affective domain: a shift from *uninvolved participation in classroom speech to infrequent utterances (especially answers) of one's own will* (i.e. from Cat. A to Cat. B), or from *one's unforced remarks to regular classroom speech* (i.e. from Cat. C to Cat. D);
- In the worldview domain: a shift from *a belief in the sense of speaking to valuing it per se* (i.e. from Cat. A to Cat. B), or from *demonstrating an inclination to speak to viewing speech as a way of learning or even being generally* (i.e. from Cat. C to Cat. D);
- In the psychomotor domain: a shift from *imitating what others utter to independent repetition of others' utterances* (i.e. from Cat. A to Cat. B), or from *troublefree articulation of familiar subject matter to undisturbed enunciation of novel language elements* (i.e. from Cat. C to Cat. D);

- In the cognitive domain: a shift from *memorising words and expressions to understanding their meaning* (i.e. from Cat. A to Cat. B), or from *actively using them in typical contexts to employing them in settings unknown to learners* (i.e. from Cat. C to Cat. D).

Having juxtaposed the concept of critical incidents against that of educational objectives in the four domains, we arrive at the following terminology that will aid us in the construction of (utterance-oriented) personal language critical educational incidents:

Table 3. Personal language critical educational incident – its build-up and subordinate concepts

| Defining criterion | Term | Meaning |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Two fundamental concepts | | |
| degree of progress | educational incident | a shift from a lower taxonomical <u>category</u> to a higher one |
| | critical educational incident | a shift from a lower taxonomical <u>level</u> to a higher one |
| Extensions | | |
| involvement of language | language educational incident | an educational incident pertaining to language |
| | language critical educational incident | a critical educational incident pertaining to language |
| involvement of attitudes | personal educational incident | an educational incident within the affective or worldview domain |
| | personal critical educational incident | a critical educational incident within the affective or worldview domain |
| involvement of language & attitudes | personal language educational incident | an educational incident within the affective or worldview domain pertaining to language |
| | personal language critical educational incident | a critical educational incident within the affective or worldview domain pertaining to language |

A *personal language critical educational incident* will thus be understood here as *an educational situation in which (a) a student's approach to subject matter changes in such a way that s/he voluntarily chooses to use language (affective domain), or (b) a student becomes convinced about his/her use of language being purposeful (worldview domain), whilst the construction of such an incident will entail recognition of obstacles preventing him or her from doing so (analytical stage) and establishing means to be employed to enable the student to reach the higher level within his or her approach (critical stage).*

Owing to the limited direct accessibility of lower-order changes, in a study presented in the later part of this text only the higher-order progress is discussed, that is the four types of shifts which are presented in the table above on the second position in each pair of terms and which contain the element of criticality as defined above.

2. Construction of personal language educational incidents – analytical stage

As we can see in the table outlining eight types of educational incidents, the element of 'personalness' occurs with the latter four cases and it is determined by incidents involving change of students' attitudes, that is a modification in his or her emotions or worldview. Having a strongly personal character, such changes appear more comprehensive than those pertaining to cognitive or psychomotor alterations (in students' abilities), which, in turn, have a narrower and more specific character (this difference in the scope of changes being reminiscent of dissimilarities on the temporal level: whilst educational objectives in the cognitive or psychomotor domain can easily be formulated for shorter periods of time, those pertaining to students' affect or worldview call for long-term measures and do not (and should not) serve as substance of short-term goals (cf. e.g. Niemierko 1997: 46).

It is of paramount importance that such personalness of educational incidents may easily pass unnoticed by the teacher owing to the fact that such events will present themselves as nothing more than usual students' utterances: even if formulated by a student after his or her internal emotional struggle ("to speak or not to speak"), a given utterance will inevitably appear as nothing extraordinary. In other words, students' utterances will remain superficial and misleading enough for teachers not to readily recognise the fact that some of students' utterances may indeed mark a significant breakthrough, and as such need to be treasured and further built upon.

Hence, diagnostic means and abilities are required for teachers to recognise (Stage 1) and create (Stage 2) conditions representing or conducive to personal language critical educational incidents. Apart from their very awareness of the fact that every utterance counts in the educational process, teachers need to approach what students utter with – to refer to Tripp's components – practical, reflexive, diagnostic and critical skills, and so support students' verbalization and self-expression.

The significance of such an analysis and teacher skills follows from the premise that when considered jointly in terms of their number and length, students' one-off utterances can undoubtedly be regarded with most students as best manifestations of their general personal approach to language (in accordance with the tendency that "if a given student happens to speak a lot during particular classes, this student will generally do so on other similar occasions, whilst a more reticent one is very likely to be of fewer words equally consistently"). Such treatment of student utterances (regardless of the school subject or discipline) conforms to the basic procedure of Tripp's critical incidence construction, whereby specific single situations, assumed to be representative of wider classes of events, are first described in detail and then qualified into broader categories so that the more general meaning of one-off events could be found (cf. *ibidem*: 46) and so that analyses of critical incidents could serve teachers also on other comparable occasions.

This generality contained in any given cluster of one-off utterances has a crucial methodological consequence: if it is accepted that – when it comes to the affective or worldview domain – the fact of a student formulating utterances reflects something about his or her overall approach to the use of language (e.g. "s/he is or is keen/reluctant to speak", or "s/he speaks only when absolutely certain

as to what to say”), then, if we choose to study how students reflect on their own use of language, it makes little difference which particular occasions or instances of utterances we ask them to remark on.

Due to the above, a study presented below has retained an open character in that the respondents were free to refer to any situations taking place at university in which their speaking (or not speaking) mattered to them personally. The study was conducted with students of Early Education at the University of Gdansk (during their regular daily classes) as they were requested to reflect and write on situations and circumstances involving (or not involving their speech). The subject matter of their classes – on *Creative Writing* – was not strictly related to speech, but, similarly to some other courses they had been attending, their limited verbal feedback substantially hampered teacher-students communication. One advantage of the classes on *Creative Writing* was that the students were being trained in expressing themselves, which was significant to the analysis conducted. The key PROBLEMS driving the study (meaning questions not shown to the respondents) were the following:

- (1) what educational role do the students assign to their own utterances in the classroom?
- (2) in which domain(s) do the students locate their choices as to speak or not to speak?
- (3) to what extent do these choices pertain to the element of personalness as defined above?
- (4) how capable of explaining their choices as to speak or not to speak do the students prove?

THE PROCEDURE used to address the four questions followed the rationale of the *technique of identification of personal constructs* as devised by Kelly (as an interpretative and organizational dimension through which a person construes his experience) (Kelly 1963), further developed by Bell (2009) and Horley (1991), and described by Bourne & Jankowicz (2012) and Buttler (2009). Hence, the study was aimed to better understand the students in their own way and, by helping them name and put in words the surrounding phenomena, support them in better understanding of themselves. Systematised reflection on their own speech, as the students claimed at the onset of the study, was a novel experience to them, which can be viewed as adding to the study’s significance.

(INPUT) First, the students were presented (on a slide displayed with a projector) with the following section of prompts:

**WHEN, WHY AND FOR WHAT REASONS
DO YOU CHOOSE TO SPEAK AT UNIVERSITY CLASSES?**

1. Please, consider the following aspects, which may prompt students to speak:

| | |
|--|---|
| affective domain (emotions) | willingness, motivation, involvement, feeling, readiness zeal, mood, wish, desire, drive, aspiration, disposition, excitement, push, satisfaction, preference, liking |
| <u>world</u> view domain (views) | belief, conviction, view, opinion, perspective position, stance, impression, outlook, vision, ideal, faith, theory, ideology, mission, <u>society</u> , environment, judgement |
| psychomotor domain (speech apparatus) | diction, pronunciation, sounds, intonation, accent expression, verbalization, articulation, consonants, vowels, hearing, tongue, elocution, phonetics, breath, speech |
| cognitive domain (knowledge) | information, memory, familiarity, comprehension, understanding data, insight, expertise, content, subject, matter, facts, lexis, grammar, vocabulary, know-how, awareness, orientation |

and

(OUTPUT) after making sure that the division shown in the table³ is clear to them, the students were presented (by the same means) with the following aggregate task (to be performed anonymously in writing on blank pieces of paper two two headings 'I SPEAK' and 'I DON'T SPEAK'):

- 2. Describe TWO typical situations: one in which you decide to speak ('I SPEAK')
and: one in which you decide NOT to speak ('I DON'T SPEAK')**

In both descriptions:

- a) refer to the domain(s) important in your case by using at least some of the nouns shown above**
(of course, you can use any other nouns related to any of the domain(s))
- b) explain what has influence on your decision and give an example, if you can remember one**
- c) explain how speaking during classes is important to you and for what reasons**
- d) explain if what you have written refers to speaking in Polish, in English, or both.**

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY. The logic behind the above reads as follows:

- on an individual scale the entire study had been intended as constituting *a critical experience* as construed by Zygmunt Mysłakowski: a student's complex of convictions, abilities etc. pertaining to language (i.e. *original experience*) is subjected to *active reflection* on classroom speech, which results in their *reconstructed experience* (c. Mysłakowski 1969: 12; preferably, the process has a recursive character with students being trained in regular reflection on the classroom speech they produce);
- the two descriptions were meant to address and reflect the two stages of CI construction, i.e. the first (analytical) stage of recognizing the boundary – via the 'I DON'T SPEAK' description, and the second (critical) stage of crossing the boundary – via the 'I SPEAK' situation (during performance of the task the order was reversed so as to make the experience more positive and success-oriented);
- the table including concepts (labels, yardsticks) representing the four domains was used as a kind of "anchor", that is a set of categories prompting the students' personal reflection and directing their descriptions; however, it was emphasised – by word of mouth – that, as said under 2(a) the ideal scenario would be for them to combine the concepts suggested with others which they find suitable;
- it is worth noting that the set of concepts included in the table could be used to build a research tool following the *psychometric* tradition, that is e.g. a set of statements formulated

³ Notes: (i) the table can be seen as a description of a student with "an ideal" approach to spoken language, that is such that wishes to speak, believes that it makes sense to do so, strives to articulate subject matter and improve by speaking (leaving aside a discussion on whether an ideal approach exists or not, the picture resulting from blending the four dimensions may undoubtedly serve as a constructive reference point); (ii) the table includes only positive concepts (without negative ones such as or 'demotivation', 'indifference', 'mispronunciation' or 'gaps') for the sake of validity of the study; (iii) the words 'world' and 'society have been outlined to point out the fact that references made to social aspects shall be read as relating to the worldview domain.

on the basis of the concepts, to be rated on a Likert's 5-point ('*Definitely not*'... '*Definitely yes*') scale (such as, for instance, 'Expressing my opinions in the classroom is important to me', or 'I believe that by speaking a lot, I can better understand what we learn at school' etc.); in the study being discussed here the set of concepts was employed in the opposite, i.e. *classroometric* fashion⁴, so that the results of the study could be applicable on a smaller scale and serve everyday academic needs of communication in English with non-native students;

- the study has thus retained a thoroughly qualitative character and has been additionally devised in such a way that the students need to "climb the ladder down" by recalling and making notes on specific details and situations (as requested under 2(b), and also to "climb the ladder up" by reflecting on more general reasons and personal stances (as elicited under 2(c));
- the study was conducted in two groups of students, with 37 respondents altogether; below only four of them (two from either of the groups) are cited and subjected to analysis (whilst the others are serving daily academic needs and aiding further classes with the two groups); the selection criterion used was a balance between the volume of text constituting the two descriptions requested.

RECOGNISING THE BOUNDARY⁵

The students provided the following responses, in which selected fragments have been marked by the author as explicitly relevant to one or more of the four domains and their exponents from the table above:

Respondent I

| <i>I DON'T SPEAK</i> | Relevance |
|--|---|
| <p><i>when I am not in good mood, and not confident about it. I am quiet shy person but I work with this problems. I am not afraid of judgment but I think it is problem with self-confident. I have problem to speak out loud because I have not good accent, diction during speech. So each time I think I am wrong I think it is not point to speak what is wrong in my opinion. Sometimes in English I can't find a word but . So my speaking depends on emotion and self-confident in group. Sometimes if the teacher is strict and gives opinion about you <u>it builds the wall between me and speaking</u>. So a lot of thing depends on atmosphere.</i></p> | <p>affective – classroom atmosphere affective – self-assessment worldview – other people affective – self-assessment psychomotor – accent blocking the student worldview – not revealed affective – group's influence interaction – teacher's negative influence</p> |

The students' conscious withdrawal from classroom speech is strongly determined by worldview-related and affective aspects, and partially by psychomotor ones. There is not a single mention of the cognitive domain. This being the case, the student's utterances carry a heavy element of

⁴ For rationale justifying looking at the two methodological traditions as opposite, see Daszkiewicz 2004.

⁵ The students have been cited literally, with all the language mistakes left uncorrected.

personalness as defined above, with the student not seeing them as crucial to understanding.⁶ This personalness falls within a lower category (of both the affective and the worldview domain) as the student does not show an internal need to speak and the speech is prompted externally.

Respondent II

| I DON'T SPEAK | Relevance |
|--|--|
| <p><i>I don't speak when I don't like the topic, sometimes the teacher. I also don't speak when I'm not sure about something – I think that lots of people say "It's wrong", "We are learning on our mistakes", but we don't want to make an impression that we are worse than others – I mean what I say something really obvious or something really stupid, something what a lot of people knew and it seems that only me didn't know something? We say we shouldn't judge people, but we are doing it, we are very often not conscious about that. I think it's all about sayings like "Jak cię widzą, tak cię słyszą" and it's very hard to get rid of this. So when I'm not sure about (especially) grammar and informations, I stay silent (but I still think about the subject). I think my non-speaking is mostly because of affective and cognitive domain, sometimes maybe worldview domain (when my view is totally different than others I just simply don't want to argue). But it's never because of psychomotor domain, maybe because I like learning new words, their pronunciation or spelling, so I'm more comfortable with this.</i></p> | <p>affective & cognitive</p> <p>social aspects</p> <p>cognitive – no novelty or no sense</p> <p>wish not to be seen as unusual</p> <p>affective – fear of judgement</p> <p>bad habits</p> <p>cognitive – uncertainty</p> <p>affective/worldview – avoiding arguments</p> |

This student's restraint from speech is determined by affective and cognitive aspects (as the student explicitly states); in the former case what matters are the opinions of others and in the latter case – the student's conviction that it is worth speaking only when the content of an utterance is in some degree new to a class/conversation and socially safe enough not to arouse arguments. The student's approach to his/her utterances is marked by a strong social element, which can be argued to render the student's decisions as to speak or not speak to reply on secondary criteria (rather than their own choice to speak and learn by doing so).

Respondent III

⁶ At this point the reader is advised to "jump" to the short section with Respondent I describing the opposite situation (I SPEAK) and to do so with the other three respondents, too. This can facilitate the reader's appreciation of the circumstances in which the boundary in question is crossed and utterance-oriented (personal) critical educational incidents occur.

⁷ Polish equivalent of the saying 'fine feathers make fine birds'.

| <i>I DON'T SPEAK</i> | Relevance |
|---|---|
| <p><i>I don't speak in many cases. I realized that I speak less during Polish classes than English classes because in Polish language I feel that I have to speak 100% correctly (when it comes to the building of sentences, their structure). I don't speak when I completely have no idea what is discussed at the classes. When I don't understand something, I ask questions only when I have concrete ones but sometimes <u>I don't know how to ask properly about some problem so I don't do it</u>. I'm afraid to not be understood. I don't speak when the teacher is too "serious" when he seems to be demanding, it encourages⁸ me since high school times. I think that also I don't speak because very often I don't feel motivated to do it during the classes. I prefer speaking my mind to people I choose, people who are close to me. I don't speak when everyone in group has different opinion than mine.</i></p> | <p>more speech in English, with correctness not being a necessity</p> <p>cognitive – lack of understanding</p> <p>cognitive – lack of ability to pose proper questions</p> <p>affective – teacher's seriousness</p> <p>affective – motivation (unspecified type)</p> <p>social aspects – unknown people</p> <p>worldview – views contrary to others</p> |

The student's abstinence from speech is, contrary to the first two respondents, claimed to be largely caused by cognitive aspects, be it lack of idea what to ask about and/or how, uncertainty as to grammatical correctness, etc. Social aspects matter a lot, too, with regard to both teachers (whose limited sense of humour proves disturbing) and other students (who are less likely to prompt the student's speech if they are unknown to the respondent). Most interestingly, in the very middle of the statement (*I'm afraid...*) the respondent ceases to apply cognitive categories (correctness, ideas, etc.) and, instead, starts to refer to affective aspects, which can be construed in this way that after a short reflection on the classroom behavior the student realizes (reaches) its cause.

Respondent IV

| <i>I DON'T SPEAK</i> | Relevance |
|--|--|
| <p><i>I don't speak when I have nothing to say about an issue (lack of knowledge about something). I prefer listening in that situation than talking about things which are not very worthy. It refers to speaking in both languages. I don't speak when person with who I talk about something is impolite and doesn't try to understand me and my point of view, believes in only his/her opinions. I prefer talking with people who can be tolerant for different ways of thinking and don't attack people with who they talk (tolerance, politeness). Sometimes <u>it is</u></i></p> | <p>cognitive – nothing novel to add</p> <p>preference of listening then</p> <p>affective/worldview – influenced by others' disregard & ignorance</p> <p>affective – need of tolerance, avoidance of interpersonal attacks</p> <p>social aspects – avoidance of conflicts</p> |

⁸ The context suggests that the respondent probably meant 'discouraged'.

better to don't speak if speaking can change in an argument. It refers to speaking in both languages.

The student's reluctance to speak strongly rests on interpersonal factors, with the eagerness to utter things weakening with interlocutors whose conduct leaves much to be desired. The classroom speech is presented by the student as a means for conveying important information on particular issues and expressing one's point of view. If neither is subjectively viewed as needed, the student chooses not to speak. Such an approach to speech, subject matter and interlocutors renders the student's unforced utterances very unlikely; there appear to be too many obstacles to overcome and too many criteria to fulfil for the student to eventually decide it is worth opening one's mouth in the classroom.

3. Construction of personal language educational incidents – critical stage

CROSSING THE BOUNDARY

Respondent I

| <i>I SPEAK</i> | Relevance |
|---|--|
| <p><i>I am emotional person, so if I am in good mood, I will speak. I feel satisfaction when I show my point of view and other people can understand me, but I must feel confident. I am not afraid of judgment if I am in group which I've known. I accept others opinion but I am not a person who push. When I speak I care about tone of my voice to change it when it is necessary. So I try to express my feelings and point of view. <u>I think speaking to others increase percentage of your understanding.</u> You also think how to speak and you link grammar, know-how, expression. I speak when I feel comfortable. I feel so in this group so I speak much more than in high school. Speaking is important because <u>when you have conversation you have brain storm with others and know them better.</u> I prefer speaking Polish because it is my first language, but I don't mind speak in English.</i></p> | <p>affective – personality affective & worldview – empathy affective – assessment by group psychomotor – tone change if needed affective – frame of mind & point of view affective – emotional condition understanding of others</p> |

The student, consistently driven by emotional aspects, proves most inclined to speech when the classroom atmosphere makes one feel their opinions are welcome. The psychomotor and cognitive domains remain secondary, with the student viewing speech as conducive to the understanding of others rather than the subject matter itself. *CRITICALITY*. What follows is that for the student to cross the boundary and to openly speak, classroom activities need to incorporate expression of opinions without subjecting them to evaluative judgments. In other words, the respondent's position makes it clear that her personal treatment of utterances can render the construction of critical educational incidents personal once those utterances are perceived by her as socially acceptable. The social

aspect itself is presented by the student even as the very aim of speech (with brainstorm enabling her to better know the classroom friends).

Respondent II

| I SPEAK | Relevance |
|---|---|
| <p><i>I speak with willingness when classes are being held in a humorous way (but not overhumorous). I also speak when the topic is important and/or interesting for me. I speak when I want to speak, I don't need pushing or encouraging. Of course the mood is also important, sometimes I'm just too tired or sleepy to speak. I like to exchange my theories or impressions but <u>rather in groups than in front of the whole class</u>. All this things don't mean that when I don't speak I don't learn (this is the stereotypical thinking that we learn only when we speak and that's why many teachers force children to speak even when they don't want to). It's totally different. <u>My silence very often means thinking, trying to solve some problems, analyzing etc.</u> And when I find out something interesting, I will share this with my friends. I also speak when I want to show that I know some for example special (I mean not very often taught at school/university or not very often used vocabulary. It gives me a message that I'm good and learning by reading English books or watching films and TV-series only in English give profits.</i></p> | <p>affective – will appreciation of humour cognitive – importance of content affective – atmosphere physical condition preference of group talk over class talk to learn, it is NOT necessary to speak learning in silence affective/worldview – social aspects: speech determined by the wish to share interesting things</p> |

The student's conscious decision to speak proves to be significantly affected by social aspects, with speaking for cognition-related reasons is explicitly depreciated and juxtaposed against learning in silence, seen as conducive to the development of higher mental faculties. A more general value that the student sees as justifying speech may be referred to as sociability exercised or presented through students sharing interesting findings and exchanging impressions. *CRITICALITY*. Accordingly, for utterance-based personal critical educational incidents to occur, the student needs to perceive a sufficient volume of interesting subject matter, the discussion of which is likely to be considered worthy of individual involvement. In other words, there thus appear a cognitive appeal as a driving force for the students' classroom utterances.

Respondent III

| I SPEAK | Relevance |
|---|--|
| <p><i>The most important in my case are affective domains (emotions). I speak when I feel comfortable, especially when I speak to smaller groups for example at the classes at University and it's easier for me to speak in English language because I'm not so much afraid of</i></p> | <p>emotions of primary importance cognitive – fear of mistakes English – lesser avoidance of speech as</p> |

making some mistakes (as long as everyone have problems with English and it's common that everyone can make a few mistakes during speaking). Mostly I speak when I **feel pushed** to do it for example during group works, pair works, presentations, when I feel **responsible** for another person or when I am pushed by the lecturer/teacher. When I am pushed to speak by the teacher I feel kind of motivated, I feel that I have a task which I have to do so I build motivation in me but it is also stressful. I speak also when I am **100% sure** about my answer for some question and when I'm in **good mood** to speak, when I see that the rest of the group start to be more open for speaking and the **atmosphere** become more **friendly**.

lesser correction expected
 affective – responsiveness to the teacher's 'push'
 worldview – responsibility for others
 affective – motivating stress
 cognitive – certainty required
 affective – suitable atmosphere

The student demonstrates greatest willingness to speak in the classroom if the teacher and/or the circumstances enforce it. Frequently considering the degree of correctness, the student more quickly undertakes the decision to speak if the class does not deem language perfection imperative and the other students commit a similar number (and type) of language mistakes (which is often the case during English-based university courses). **CRITICALITY**. Most interestingly, the student presents responsibility for others (preferably, in a small group) as a more general value inciting the student's speech. Hence, we are dealing here with a situation in which it is the student's wish to "defend others" that causes the educational incident to become critical (as the student crosses the boundary between not speaking and speaking) and personal (as the reasons for the student not being speechless any longer fall into the realm of the worldview domain and its social dimension).

Respondent IV

| <i>I SPEAK</i> | Relevance |
|---|--|
| <p><i>I speak when I am want to give somebody information for example about my views or ideas. It is connected with my feelings and emotions (disagree, agree, motivation). I think that it is important to express our views. <u>I like talk about situations and issues that I care</u> and I can express my thoughts. It refers to speaking in both languages.</i></p> | <p>affective/worldview – emotional attitude to personal opinions affective/worldview – liking for expression of beliefs</p> |
| <p><i>I speak when I want to improve my speaking skills (knowledge, self-confidence, challenge, improvement, progress, fluently speech). It is important to still try to be better and take a risk – try to speak in English in different situations.</i></p> | <p>cognitive/psychomotor/affective – speech for increasing one's overall language skills; speech as "binding" qualities of a competent language user</p> |

The student's keenness to speak occurs when the classroom talk pertains to issues related to everyday life. Such relevant language use generates conditions conducive to positive emotions and candid expression of ideas. It appears that the connection with the student's reality underlies situations in which utterance-oriented critical educational incidents occur more readily. **CRITICALITY**. The student demonstrates awareness of how significant are individual attempts to apply language

whenever possible and how wide a range of benefits such endeavours result in, which shows a slight contradiction in the student's approach to speech: despite being aware of the numerous gains, the students proves very easily discouraged and not sufficiently determined to achieve those gains. Such an evasive attitude on the part of the student proves to be supported by the student associating speaking in novel settings or on novel issues with the category of *risk* (although its precise character is left unspecified by the student, that is we do not know what type of consequences the students associates it with).

FINDINGS. Although the study was not aimed at any form of generalization, some observations can be made that apply to nearly all the foursome cited (as well as other respondents whose replies have not been shown above). Considering these similarities through the prism of the two problems concerning the issue of where the students locate their decisions as to when to speak or not (i.e. Problems (2) and (3)), it was observed that, on the whole, **most remarks made on the two situations, i.e. 'I SPEAK' and 'I DON'T SPEAK'**, (similarly to replies provided by other students, not cited here) **pertained to the affective and worldview domains**, which is a most significant observation. Prior to the study, these two domains had been put under a common denominator in that it is these two domains that the personalness of educational incidents rests on. This common ground among the respondents can be regarded as good news, because due to their approach being heavily concordant, similar measures taken to elicit speech are likely to work with different students. Generally speaking, what was very striking in the analysis of replies by different respondents was nearly complete absence of references to the psychomotor domain. This fact is not interpreted here to imply that pronunciation, intonation etc. are so unimportant to respondents, but, instead, it is considered to show that the affective and worldview domains are most vital and take precedence over all the other aspects.

Applying the terminology introduced in Table 3, we can infer from the statements cited that in the case of all four students (and many others not cited here) all instances of *language critical educational incidents* (as remembered by the respondents) are *personal language critical educational incidents*: they take an internal decision to speak on the basis of emotions and beliefs rather than cognition or articulation (their declarations in this respect, being anonymous and supported by consistent argument, are viewed here to raise no doubts as to whether or not they conform to their real decisions). This is of paramount importance to teachers and their elicitation of students' speech, with the affective and worldview aspects being more convincing to the students and psychomotor and cognitive aspects needing more time devoted to justification of why it is worth uttering things.

4. Utterance as an educational value

A thorough analysis of the students' responses leads to two more highly significant observations related to the two other research problems formulated above, both having a more general character than the comments made in the previous section of this text with reference to the two "central" problems. Namely, these observations concern:

- Problem (4):

From consideration of the overall character of the students' descriptions of the two situations **there transpires students' limited capability of explaining their own choices and decisions concerning classroom speech**: although the students were requested to explain their own decisions concerning speech by references to specific examples and to general values of beliefs (this range of options was suggested in the very instructions seen on a slide and additionally emphasised by word of mouth

before the students began to write), their comments fell into a surprisingly narrow spectrum, that is they proved neither too specific nor too general. The respondents (most probably short of experience in reflecting on their own utterances) did not do much “climbing” downwards or upwards, which is highly significant for other studies concerning students’ approach to classroom speech. In other words, the respondents appeared to be highly inexperienced in developing autonarrations, which, as Hempolińska notes, provide a person with a sensible context for undertaken decisions and affect the perception of attractiveness of executed aims (cf. Hempolińska 2006: 31) and the formation of which, as the respondents stated unanimously in the course of a discussion on what they wrote in the task outlined above, was “unusual” and “rather weird”. To the author of this text, the approach to reflection on one’s own speech expressed by such comments appears far more astonishing: it is beyond any doubt that by reflecting on why students speak and why not, they gain valuable insight into the process of learning and experiencing what they learn, which in the case of university students (particularly those who are going to work as teachers themselves and communicate with those they will happen to teach) merits regular practice.

- Problem (1)

Most importantly, **the respondents prove to assign a clearly subservient role of speech in the classroom: regardless of which domain(s) they locate their choices as to why and when to speak, and why and when NOT to speak.** In their comments, the position of language is presented as secondary in education, functioning as a tool, without constituting an aim in itself. In other words, the students’ vision of the role of classroom language is that:

students’ speech serves classroom activities
rather than
classroom activities serve students’ speech,

which, by definition, lessens the likelihood of them speaking during lessons: if the classroom goals underlying classroom activities – in the students’ subjective (realized or not) view – can be obtained by means other than language, speech becomes redundant. Such a **utilitarian approach** to language is manifested in the manner in which the students structure their responses, some good examples of which have appeared above:

I speak when I want to givebody information...

...this is the stereotypical thinking that we learn only when we speak

I also speak when I want to show that...

I speak when I feel pushed to do it for example during group works, pair works, presentations ..

Hence, **the subservient role of language as assigned to it by students relates substantially to the affective and worldview domains and in their perception of speech as a tool, utterances serve, as we noted above, classroom activities.** What is evidently missing in their approach to spoken language is its conducive psychomotor and cognitive effect. Whilst it is fairly understandable that the former is not mentioned by students whose majority of classes and lectures are conducted in their native language and so no apparent need for articulation practice seems necessary, **the negligence of more generally educational, i.e. cognitive impact of speech,** is not easily justifiable and highly disturbing. (In the responses cited Respondent I is the only one to note the (believed-in) cause-and-effect relationship between speaking and (general) understanding, with the others (and also a vast majority of the respondents not cited above) do not refer to the overall educational appeal of

student speech at all.) Accordingly, there are no statements along the following lines that we might envisage:

I do my best to speak as much as possible to see that I'm learning things, or

I seize all opportunities to express myself so that my teachers correct me if I think wrong, or

Speaking in the classroom is students' shortest way to full mastery of subject matter, or

The more we speak at lessons on various school subjects, the quicker we learn them

Going further in this direction and thinking of other beneficial effects of speech, we might as well envisage statements – which, in similarity to those general-education-oriented, are missing in the responses of the four students cited – presenting (substantive) **speech as an aim in itself**, an educational value that students might wish to be equipped with and to have developed for no particular purpose other than to attain an attribute representative of knowledgeable and competent graduates⁹. Such statements might be formulated along the following lines:

I get involved in group work so as to exercise and experience speech

I see classroom speech as an ability worth developing regardless of the discipline and subject matter

I do wish my school made me able to speak for a while about all the issues we study in it

If you are able to speak on all topics and with anyone (with all possible "collecutors" around you – cf. Maruszewski 1975: 1), then you can consider yourself well educated

Taking one more step in this way of thinking about spoken language in the classroom, we can also note that in the study we did not observe in the responses provided any **references to speech as part of the students' attribute of personality**, a manifestation of their subjectivity, reflecting types of discourse students happen to have come in contact with (cf. Richardson 2009: 460). Should students view (realise) the speech they use to be thus strongly linked to how and what they think and are, they might produced statements such as:

I speak in order to go beyond the discourse I have thus far managed to produce myself...

if people do not know what and how I speak, they don't really know me...

I see the world through language and by speaking I construct my reality more consciously...

As speaking individuals, we jointly construct the language of education.. (cf. Czerepaniak 2006: 166)

All in all, **the (developmental) potential of classroom speech proved grossly undervalued** and the quantity of the four types of statements differed remarkably, that is:

- those whereby speech serves classroom activities were most frequent,
- those whereby speech serves general education were rare,
- those whereby speech is an aim/educational value is itself were not observed, and
- those whereby speech is reflective of personality/subjectivity were not observed, either.

⁹ Such an approach to speech as an educational aim in itself, complementaty to viewing it as a tool, was propagated by the first conference of the Educational Role of Language cycle (held in Gdańsk in 2016), the subtitle of which read "Learn to speak, speak to learn".

All of the above does not prove the respondents *wrong* as to their own vision of when and why it is worthwhile speaking; after all, it is an individual issue, with regard to which one inevitably develops a personal stance, which is neither right nor erroneous. If we look at classroom utterances through the prism of educational domains as above, we can say that four different routes of reaching the same target (that is criticality understood as crossing the boundary and beginning to speak) can be distinguished. Whilst it is impossible to generalize as to whether more frequent mentions of the affective and worldview domain facilitates or complicates construction of personal critical educational incidents, broadening students' subjective view of producing spoken utterances is most advisable.

The suggestion here is rather that the two complement each other and neither of the two "does the job". It clearly points, however, to the significance of the eponymous construction of language educational incidents, particularly critical ones (as defined above). The study shows that the respondents' motivation to speak in the classroom needs to be reshaped in such a way that they do see speaking as one of other educational aims¹⁰.

It must finally be added that in the particular case presented above in our discussion of the study, i.e. with students of Early Education, the lack of references to the educational edge of speech is particularly significant and may have important consequences for the children that at a later stage of their life they will happen to teach.

¹⁰ This approach to speaking is reminiscent of the approach to motivation to learn a foreign language as proposed by Ryszard Wenzel, whereby the more directly it concerns language itself (rather than survival, a social position, or as a means of learning other subjects), the more durable it is (R. Wenzel).