

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPEAKING STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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***Abstract:** Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. In order to teach second language learners how to speak in the best way possible, some speaking activities are provided, that can be applied to ESL and EFL classroom settings, together with suggestions for teachers who teach oral language.*

***Key words :** communicative competence, minimal responses, recognizing strips, circumlocution, avoiding repetition*

Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process.

Communicative competence – an ability and knowledge of a language user about how, what and where to speak appropriately from the view point of culture, traditions, shared rules and norms. An ability of understanding social meaning and being understood within a social context. It consists of four aspects: linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic/discourse, and strategic competence. Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Unlike the audio-lingual method, the Communicative Approach gives priority to the semantic content of language learning. That is, learners learn the grammatical form through meaning not the other way around. Thus, "learning activities are selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns)" (Richards & Rogers, 1986: 72).

Canale and Swain introduced four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical competence (grammatical and lexical capacity), sociolinguistic competence (understanding of social context and the communicative purpose for interaction), discourse competence (how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text) and strategic competence (coping strategies that communicators employ to repair, redirect, etc. communication). Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies - using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language -- that they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it.

These instructors help students learn to speak so that the students can use speaking to learn.

1. Using minimal responses

Language learners who lack confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction often listen in silence while others do the talking. One way to encourage such learners to begin to participate is to help them build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges. Such responses can be especially useful for beginners.

Minimal responses are predictable, often idiomatic phrases that conversation participants use to indicate understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying. Having a stock of such responses enables a learner to focus on what the other participant is saying, without having to simultaneously plan a response.

2. Recognizing scripts

Some communication situations are associated with a predictable set of spoken exchanges -- a script. Greetings, apologies, compliments, invitations, and other functions that are influenced by social and cultural norms often follow patterns or scripts. So do the transactional exchanges involved in activities such as obtaining information and making a purchase. In these scripts, the relationship between a speaker's turn and the one that follows it can often be anticipated.

Instructors can help students develop speaking ability by making them aware of the scripts for different situations so that they can predict what they will hear and what they will need to say in response. Through interactive activities, instructors can give students practice in managing and varying the language that different scripts contain.

3. Using language to talk about language

Language learners are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them. Instructors can help students overcome this reticence by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, whatever the participants' language skill levels. Instructors can also give students strategies and phrases to use for clarification and comprehension check.

By encouraging students to use clarification phrases in class when misunderstanding occurs and by responding positively when they do, instructors can create an authentic practice environment within the classroom itself. As they develop control of various clarification strategies, students will gain confidence in their ability to manage the various communication situations that they may encounter outside the classroom.

Being a 'good speaker' requires a range of skills beyond accurate grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, though these are the basic building blocks that enable a message to be understood.

An effective communicator chooses the words they use, and the way in which they speak to different people in different situations, whether that is ordering a sandwich at a snack bar or giving a keynote speech at an academic event.

The skills involved in how we interact with others in different ways are called communicative competencies: teachable skills which frame the language used in interaction in different settings.

Speaking as a language skill involves these competencies much more than it requires accuracy of language, so when we talk about 'teaching speaking', we are talking about something different from grammar or vocabulary practice.

Speaking can be used to practice new language (as is common in question-answer tasks or role-plays held after specific language instruction, but this kind of activity may not teach the skill of speaking itself.

2. Teaching speaking as a set of competencies

Just as we can instruct, present and practice specific grammar features to students, the component competencies which make up speaking as a pure language skill can also be broken down and presented systematically.

Some useful language sub-skills which can be turned into practice activities are:

Avoiding repetition

Responding appropriately while listening

Turn-taking techniques

Politeness

Circumlocution (talking around unknown words using known language)

Extending ideas

None of these sub-skills make specific reference to grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation, though obviously these are necessary for students to communicate what they want to say.

In order to bring the focus onto these competencies, it is therefore advisable to lead speaking tasks on topics that are familiar to students, and using language that is within their ability. Taking the strain of new language out of speaking activities allows students to focus on the pure sub-skills listed above.

This is similar to the way in which native speakers are ‘trained’ for public speaking or assertiveness in social situations: as native speakers, they are comfortable with the structure of their own language, but want to develop other skills which go along with that.

3. Discourse and organisation of message

Many of these features of speaking fall into the category of discourse – the organisation and style of a message as it is delivered in different situations.

When teaching speaking in a given context, we should pay attention to how people actually speak in that situation.

Recordings of people interacting in restaurants, banks which is quite formulaic and predictable can be used as a structure for the dialogues that you present and practice in class, only with the organisation and ordering of the speech as the focus of the class rather than the specific language used.

Taking an opposite approach, think of situations where the above list of competencies is common.

For example: we often use circumlocution when we are talking about complex, technical subjects, like when we describe a problem we are having with a gas cooker,

car engine or plumbing; we may not know the exact name of the part which is not working, but we can still communicate it to a gas fitter, mechanic or plumber.

This is a useful life skill, and one which can be used to harness second-language speaking for language learners.

4. Restricted and free speaking

Also, as with grammar and vocabulary, we can incorporate these target competencies into standard formats of lessons – we can present the feature of speech through an audio or video task, and then ask students to practise applying the feature in a restricted task.

Gapped dialogues, ordering lines in a script, or choosing the best alternative from three different responses in a conversation, for example.

As long as the learners are playing with language they already know, their ‘discourse brains’ will be more engaged and they will have more focus on the competencies they are learning.

Free speaking tasks should be exactly that: student-student interaction which does not have too many limitations.

Give students a topic or situation and ask them to script out a typical interaction in that situation.

Assign roles to different students, so that they can practise speaking to different ‘people’, and see how they flex their ideas when talking to their boss as compared to their 7-year-old daughter.

This will open up the features they are learning in application to different types of speech.

Finally, be aware that although your learners have been focusing on these great features of spoken communication, they have not yet had the opportunity to fully apply these until they have spoken totally freely, without a script, or notes to work from (after all, native speakers don’t carry scripts around with them to use in sandwich bars, though they do have an ‘expected script’ in their mind which informs their use of language), by participating in a speaking event with another student or students.

The same dialogue that was used in free practice can be repeated, though with different participants to ensure spontaneity and flexibility with language. Only then can you say that students have truly applied what they are learning by the end of the class.

Conclusion:

All in all, when planning a speaking skills lesson, be aware that using language in speech is not necessarily practice of speaking as a language skill. Developing the range of competencies that make 'a good speaker' takes focus on the ways that we speak to different people, and the ways we construct what we are saying. This is independent from the grammar and vocabulary we use in real life, so should be kept separate from pure language input in the language classroom.

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