

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIVE TASKS THAT PROMOTE SPOKEN INTERACTION SKILLS IN ELT

Salieva Zarrina Ilhomovna

Senior teacher at Samarkand state institute of foreign languages, PhD,

UZBEKISTAN

ABSTRACT

In modern Uzbekistan, the role of teaching and developing foreign languages, especially English, nowadays is of great value. Learning English is a demand of life and represents one of the essential requirements of today's society. Teaching and learning English in Uzbekistan has officially gained importance since the new presidential decree №1875 on December 10, 2012 - "On further improvement of the system of foreign languages learning" has been signed. As it was stated the problem of teaching foreign languages using communicative methods, particularly English, is a problem of developing society with new strategies, goals and objectives. Therefore, teachers of Uzbekistan are in active search for effective language teaching and creating modern tasks to develop students' communicative language use. The present article describes the importance of teaching speaking skills for the first year students in Samarkand state institute of foreign languages. The author represents effective ways and methods of teaching spoken interaction skills.

Keywords: Teaching English, speaking skills, interaction, effective tasks.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic skills of communicative language teaching is 'Speaking'. It is generally accepted that language acquisition without developing speaking skill is very difficult. The importance of teaching speaking in English is considered as the initial demand of language learning. However, as researches and own teaching experiences show, oral skills have not always been viewed as a central issue in English language pedagogy in Uzbekistan. Moreover, it has been found that majority of learners have troubles with speaking, especially organizing their ideas in an appropriate way, delivering an oral report in front of audience, accuracy and fluency. Speaking is a skill, and such needs to be developed and practiced independently of the other skills curriculum. For that reason, it was intended to carry out a research on this issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In present, a lot of English' teachers are used to teach language by the means of communicative approach. The most frequently accessed and focused areas of this approach are the four-macro skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing. Teachers' job is to help students to learn new words and to help them to combine these words together in a meaningful way. The meaning of a piece of language is context dependent. So, students tend to speak more than they write, listen or read. This means that speaking skills seems the most important of all the four language skills. Many methodologists considered this skill as the priority in language teaching (Littlewood, 1994; Morrov,1981). As Ur mentions, speaking seems intuitively the most important, as it include all other kinds of knowing and many learners are primarily interested in it (Ur, 1999). Additionally, "Speaking is

productive skill in the oral mode. It is like the other skills, is more complicated than it seems at the first and involves more than just pronouncing words” (Azem, M. & Dogar, M., 2011). Similarly, Nunan says, that the ability to operate in a second language can be actually equated to the ability to speak that language (Nunan, 1999). In order to clarify what speaking is, he finds out some distinctions between speaking and writing. Firstly, speaking must be listened by other people. It is received temporarily and immediately. When we listen to other people, it has special aspects like stress, rhythm, and intonation. While speaking, the interlocutor gives an instant feedback to the speaker directly. By speaking activity, orator or speaker have to pay attention of planning and editing by channel. In comparison writing can be seen by readers. The writer uses punctuation as well to make others clearer in vision or reading the meaning. Written language is perennial and reader can receive the information later than the time it was created. We can spend unlimited amount of time on planning and correct the mistakes in written speech. Finally, he came to the conclusion that “Speaking is productive oral skill and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning” (Nunan, 2003, p.48). Moreover, Mc. Jo says “Speaking is not the oral production of written language, but involves students in the mastery of a wide range of subskills, which, added together, constitute an overall competence in the spoken language” (Mc. Jo 2003, p.135). Learners always communicate through speaking, though people can judge a language learning proficiency by their ability of speaking. Likewise, Brown states that speaking a language refers to carrying on a conversation cannily (Brown, 2001, p. 267). He cites that people can be treated as a successful learner when they show an ability to get wise goals through an interactive discourse with other language speakers.

Speech is often spontaneously produced in a very limited time frame. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensively. Ability of easy communication in English in real life situations is one of indicators of quality of command of the language. Mc. Jo also comments that “If we are hoping to make our students communicatively component in English as a foreign or second language, then it seems fair to assume that speaking skills will play a large part in this overall competence, although we should point out that in the early years of communicative language teaching, ‘communicative’ was interpreted by and large as oral production with other tree skills lagging somewhat behind” (Mc. Jo, 2003, p. 136). In this regard, development of students’ skills and abilities of speech is necessary and obviously important for communication. Summing up all the above-mentioned ideas, we can give many reasons why student of Samarkand state institute of foreign languages should acquire mainly this skill:

- It is the means of spoken production and interaction;
- Students often evaluate their proficiency of language on the basis of how much they feel they have improved their spoken skills;
- It plays a great role in improving communicative competence;
- It improves students communicative skills all together – they can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each real situations;
- It can show the correctness and language errors that a student’s makes.

In Uzbekistan, the speaking skill is a critical part of learning and the teaching process. In other words, as own teaching experience shows, there are many problems that occur during teaching and learning this skill.

Goal of the study

As a teacher of English, we have a responsibility to prepare students as much as possible to be able to speak in the real world, to interact and product-spoken language not only in the classroom, but also out of it. For realization of these goals, it is necessary:

- to determine cause and troubles in learning speaking skills of the students;
- to remove the problems that occur during teaching speaking skills;
- to define adequate methods in developing speaking skills lessons;
- to find out effective activities of developing spoken interaction skills.

Problems in teaching speaking

Many researchers argued that students can learn to speak only by speaking, if that is so then fluency and confidence are equally important goals of speaking practice (Scrivener, 2005, p. 146). This fact is quite important in mastering English as the means of communication. They should feel comfortable and confident during the activities (Tsui, 1996). Only then, they can improve and develop their speaking skills. Nevertheless, as experiences of teaching English show, teachers come across with many problems while teaching speaking.

Despite the fact that some students of Samarkand state institute of foreign languages who have learnt English more than ten years, they are unable to use the language fluently and accurately. The reason of these can be found in many causes. We have observed that many students are unprepared or unwilling to speak; they have no experience in participating imaginatively and exercising initiatively, because of their poor knowledge of the language and rigid formal training. Most of them are shy and very passive. The speaking skill considered not very important during the lessons, as the main goal in teaching English was to prepare a student that, can read, write and translate.

There are many more reasons for students' unwillingness to speak during the lessons. It seemed more reasonable to give the Ur's reasons of difficulties that she encounters in getting students to speak in the classroom (Ur, 1999, p.121). As she mentions teachers are faced with the following problems while teaching speaking:

- Inhibition: Students are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom. They are worried about making mistakes, about their linguistic abilities learning that others may be more competent and proficient than themselves. In our mind, general anxiety, social anxiety and foreign language anxiety are presented in this students experience.
- Nothing to say: Even if they are not inhibited, we often hear students complain that they cannot think of anything to say.
- Low or uneven participation: Only one participant talks at a time or he or she dominates the group while others speak very little or not at all. In a large group each member gets very little talking time.
- Mother-tongue use: When students work in pairs or groups they just end up chatting in their own language. The use of mother tongue is easier than speaking in a foreign language.

Removing the problems

How teacher could avoid these problems and help students to develop their speaking skills in these situations? We have analyzed the methodological literature due to this question.

Speaking is very complicated skill and covers external and internal aspects. Brown points out that for external factors speaking requires much more practice and students' embarrassment and shortage of stimulation may bring negative effects into the learning process (Brown, 2001, p.270). They need more practice speaking during the lessons. As for the intrinsic problems, speech is fluent and students need to learn all the aspects of language. Furthermore, they have to know informal words and reduced forms including contractions, elisions or reduced vowel, phonological features of speech sound in English. Macaro points out that language learning mostly depends on student's behavior. Effective speakers do not hesitate for too long when they cannot think of how to say something in foreign language. Most of them try to find solutions to the problems. In these way they involved in the interaction with others in L2 (Macaro, 2001, p. 38). To know certain ways of reinforcing in foreign languages is a good ability while communicating in English. Therefore, we also consider that students motivation and inspiration is the initial factor of successful language learning.

Ur suggests: "Good speaking skills classrooms are ones where learners talk a lot, participation is even, motivation is high and the language is at an acceptable level" (Ur,1999, p.120). If students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom, they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. Therefore, as we can see, teachers of English need to be aware of motivation, which is a consideration in determining whether students are willing to communicate: the more meaningful the materials and tasks are for the students involved the better the outcome will be. Therefore, motivation is very important feature that promote the development of speaking skill.

Scott Thornbury, in his book *How to Teach Speaking*, suggests that the teaching of speaking depends on there being a classroom culture of speaking, and that classrooms need to become 'talking classrooms'. In other words, students will be much more confident speakers if this kind of speaking activation is a regular feature of the lesson (Thornbury, 2002). As experiences show dedicated speaking skills lessons are very useful. Realistic classroom speaking activities could be seen as an opportunity for rehearsing the things students may want to do outside the classroom, but in a safe environment, where mistakes can be learned from, rather than lead to difficulties and embarrassment. For realization of the goal, it is necessary to define adequate methods in developing speaking skills lessons. As teaching practice shows one of the ways is usage of communicative activities that form communicative freedom for students and possibility of independent realization of their creative potential at the lesson. Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners. Efficiency of this activity is based on putting the students in conditions under which they will have to communicate and exchange opinions on the topic set by the teacher at that moment. Moreover, as it was analyzed during the lessons of English, we have concluded, that it is one of the helpful methods for short-term oral fluency improvement for the philological profile students of B2 level.

Helpful communicative approach activities

Many methodologies and teachers of English argue that student learns speaking in foreign language by interacting. The best method that can help for this situation is communicative language teaching. This method mostly based on real-life communicative situations that provide students to communicate with each other in the target language. Larsen-Freeman points out that "if teachers intend students to use the target language, then they must truly understand all that being communicatively component entails" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000,

p.135). Therefore, teachers should create real-life situational activities with the help of authentic materials and meaningful tasks that promote oral language communication.

There are many effective activities that promote spoken interaction skills in English. Below are examples of tasks designed for the first course students studying English at Samarkand state institute of foreign languages.

✚ Using grid activities. The power of using conversation *grid activities* is that students are involved in authentic, independent, and cooperative conversation without direct teacher involvement. These grids can be used with any topic as teaching or assessment activities. Learners usually enjoy them greatly.

Example: Students work in groups of around four or five. Give one student the Student A slip and a second student the Student B slip. Students A and B then take turns to make the announcement on their slips of paper, inventing any additional details in order to make the announcement longer. The other students should interrupt the speakers in order to clarify the meaning of any words and phrases they do not understand. Note that the phrases in bold are intended to be difficult or impossible to understand, and are therefore explained at the bottom. Of course, the listeners have no way of knowing which phrases are in bold and which are not, so they will have to be brave and ask about everything they are unsure of. At the end, discuss with the class whether the listeners managed to ask about all the phrases in bold.

Many students worry about their mistakes and allow their insecurities to prevent them from participating in such kind of activities fully. This activity provides reassurance that such insecurities are very common and normal. It presents some strategies for increasing their confidence and ability to participate actively. The activity also warns students that they themselves are responsible for overcoming this barrier to communication.

✚ Using role-play activities. Role play activities help students to speak in different social contexts and to assume varied social roles in the classroom. This activity is practical, entertaining, and gets students to produce authentic English. Students will be more motivated and eager to participate if you present them with a realistic situation that they might encounter in their daily lives.

Example: a variation of detective role-play game as Alibi. The teacher invents a crime – probably related to grammar or vocabulary the students have been learning – and, say, three students are sent out of the classroom to concoct an alibi about what they were doing when the crime was committed. The three students are now called back one by one and questioned by the rest of the class. When the second student comes in, the class try to find inconsistencies with the alibi of the first of the three. The same happens when the third student of the three turns up. The class then highlights the inconsistencies and guesses who the ‘criminal’ is. Of course, it doesn’t actually matter who they decide on since the game is simply designed to have students ask and answer, using their questions and answers as fluently as possible.

Using such realistic situations gets students to practice essential vocabulary and phrases in such a way that they will be better able to retain what they learn. Role play technique has a positive impact in improving students’ speaking skills as it gives the students a chance to explore different situations of real life and enables them to speak accurately and confidently in that situation in the target language.

✚ Using jigsaw activities. Jigsaw activities are more elaborate information gap activities that can be done with several partners. *In a jigsaw activity, each partner has one or a few*

pieces of the "puzzle," and the partners must cooperate to fit all the pieces into a whole picture. The puzzle piece may take one of several forms. It may be one panel from a comic strip or one photo from a set that tells a story. It may be one sentence from a written narrative. It may be a tape recording of a conversation, in which case no two partners hear exactly the same conversation.

This activity is good for a change of pace and gets learners out of their chairs interacting with everyone in the class. A great deal of peer teaching and friendly conversation can happen throughout this activity.

✚ Using communication game activities. Speaking activities based on games are often useful way of giving students valuable practice. Game based activities can involve practice of oral strategies such as describing, predicting, simplifying, asking for feedback etc. There are several kinds of games that learners enjoy in the classroom. Games give learners opportunities to use the language they are learning in non-threatening, enjoyable contexts. *Example: Student A has a plan of a city center in Samarkand containing the Amit Timur Street, school, library, shops, houses etc. Student B then has to draw the plan as accurately as possible from the description given by student A.*

All above-mentioned communicative activities considerably enrich English lessons, do them significant for philological profile students of B2 level and maintain interest for studying English.

CONCLUSION

Teaching speaking is a great importance in learning English because it contributes to success in acquisition of the second language. We can point out that well-prepared communicative activities such as conversation grid, communication games, role plays and jigsaw activities can encourage students to experiment and innovate with the language, and create a supportive atmosphere that allows them to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment. This will contribute to their self-confidence as speakers and to their motivation to learn more. Keeping in mind that each classroom offers a wide range of students differing in their abilities, knowledge, confidence, motivation and learning styles, a teacher should provide students with a proper environment that would help them develop their speaking skills, independent of their basic characteristics and diversity.

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