УДК 378.091.33-028.16:811.11

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ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM
IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The article examines several issues related to the teaching of the speaking skill in the EFL classroom, focusing especially on the design of speaking materials used for oral production. The fact is that L2 teachers have the responsibility of presenting learners with high quality learning materials, adapting speaking materials appeared in textbooks so as to help them develop the oral production skill. Similarly, the speaking materials used in the EFL classes should be adapted to the individual characteristics of learners. Thus, it would be advisable to analyse the learning potential of oral production activities, taking into account the degree of difficulty of each task as well. Hence the importance of exploring the ways in which oral tasks could be most effectively implemented in the EFL classroom.

Concepts for teaching speaking as comprehensible input, repetition, memorization, inter-language, pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, interaction, pair-work, negotiation of meaning, output or self-repair, among others, such as managing a conversation, role play, sentence stems, moving discussion, survey, telling stories, solving problems, keep talking, informations gaps, ask me my questions, are all intimately related to the development of speaking, so every teacher is assumed to be fairly acquainted with them.

Keywords: *speaking, teaching, English language, communication.*

It is obvious that speaking represents a significant and also amazing skill essential for social survival. In fact: "Of all the four skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as "speakers" of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing".

The main purpose of this paper is to help open new paths and perspectives on the developing foreign language speaking or how to teach conversation and push students to really speak.

In the field of linguistics, Arnold draws attention to its pre-eminent role in language competence as well: "The speaking is so central to our thinking about language learning that when we refer to speaking a language we often mean knowing a language". Consequently, speaking is a skill which: "deserves attention. Our learners often need to be able to speak with confidence in order to carry out many of their most basic transactions" [1].

It is equally clear that the nature of speaking and the peculiar demands that a success-oriented practice imposes have made the consideration of it as a complex skill the prevailing one, the teaching of which has awaken feelings of uneasiness among teachers. For them, teaching speaking becomes twice as challenging and demanding as that of any other communicative skill, particularly in non-native language.

Dealing with speaking effectively requires a careful approach and class time should be devoted to train learners specifically in this regard. Students will only

deploy the ability to interact freely through a language once they have accumulated great doses of oral practice in the active use of it. A language class in which the centrality of grammar is overriding will not immediately bring about successful speakers [3].

It is important to be fully aware of the true nature and conditions of speech in order to understand neatly what successful speaking comprehends and requires. At the surface level, one may claim that speaking effectively equally implies being able to listen and to understand, as these skills very often co-occur. Speaking, thus, is essentially reciprocal because any interlocutor may contribute at any time to the development of the discourse, and to respond quickly to anyone else's hint.

At a more deeply-structured level of study, speaking should be regarded as a general macro-skill which is made up of several processes. Levelt suggested that speech production implies four major psycholinguistic tasks, namely: conceptualisation, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring. Conceptualisation has to do with planning the content of the message to be transmitted. Formulation is the stage in which the speaker finds the actual words and phrases (necessary to convey the intended meaning), sequences them and inserts the adequate grammatical links[8]. Articulation is the process concerned with the organs of producing speech. Finally, self-monitoring is the phase in which one notices the mistakes and self-repairs.

Automation is required for effective spoken language, so any potential user of any language should develop it. However any speaker's attention capacity is limited. If attention is shifted from one of the processes to another, how can automation deploy?

On the other hand, getting learners to focus on accuracy is likely to encourage a less exploratory or fluent use of the language. Pushing them to develop fluency, might encourage greater use of formulaic chunks of language, discouraging attention to accuracy and reducing speakers' capacity for processing complex language. Leading them to experiment with new expressions or new combinations of words and phrases might jeopardise their accuracy or fluency [5].

To the above stated, we should add that because in most cases speech is produced literally against the clock and it is unrehearsed, a successful speaker must also develop the ability to make quick decision (such as, for example, on the exact wording) on the spot as s-/he does not usually enjoy much time for re-drafting. Actually, time pressure is one of the major constraints of naturally occurring speech. Because speakers have little time to organise and execute their message, they often explore phrasing as they speak. The kind of behaviour that speakers tend to show while using the language gives rise to four ordinary characteristics of spoken language that Bygate has explored and explained. Then, for him, speech is typically characterised by: 1) improvisation and the use of less complex syntax, 2) incomplete sentences, broken clauses and abbreviations, 3) use of fixed conventional language or "formulaic expressions",

and 4) devices to gain time to elaborate one's message and give shape to one's thoughts, such as "fillers", pauses or hesitations. Bygate has established a differentiation between "facilitation devices" and "compensation devices" [4]. Facilitating features include simplification, ellipsis, formulaic expressions ad fillers. "Compensation features" include self-correction, false starts, repetition and rephrasing. These features: "all help reduce memory load, just as they help to lighten the planning load" [2].

Concerning knowledge, speakers must know the rules for accuracy. We know how to combine words and compose sentences. We can decide whether sentences are right or wrong. We can understand and memorize things. This knowledge, coming from different sources, is it is interesting to note the extent to which speaking is an activity that implies quick decisions. Many problems may appear and language users have to adjust our conversation. We can rehearse, practice and imitate how to do this. Being knowledgeable with certain rules and principles in the abstract is not enough. In order to sent an oral message, speakers should be skilful at it. However, that does not mean that language necessarily has to be error free[6]. A learner may communicate effectively even if their language is inaccurate in places. They may be able to correct themselves to some extent, but if they pay a lot of attention to accuracy they may lose fluency (speaking without too many pauses and hesitations) and listeners may become frustrated. Native speakers frequently pause and sometimes correct or rephrase what they say [9].

With all these premises in mind, it is important to highlight concepts such as comprehensible input, repetition, memorization, inter-language, pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, interaction, pair-work, negotiation of meaning, output or self-repair, among others, are valued in its potential to offer the learners a way in developing speaking.

Several of the activities described below are very flexible and can be easily adjusted for level. For example, if learners are to construct a story, the teacher can easily adjust the amount of support that is offered through doing such things as pre-teaching relevant vocabulary, or giving a model story from which the structure can be copied. Role plays can be adjusted for level through the choice of scenario and the amount of support that is given before learners act it out.

Here are some ideas for teaching speaking:

1. Sentence stems. Dictate the beginning of five o six sentences. The learners must write what they hear and complete the sentences for themselves. For example:

The teacher dictates:

In the future I hope to…

The learners complete the sentence stems appropriately, for example: "*In the future I hope to travel around the world*". The teacher then puts the learners into groups to discuss the ways in which they have completed the sentences and to ask each other questions about what they have written: "*What countries would you like to go to?*" and so on. The teacher listens to the discussion and later

gives feedback.

2. Role play. Set up a role play. For example: *There is a proposal to build a new chemical factory in a town. Some residents think this is a good idea because there is currently high unemployment. Some residents think this is a bad idea because they are concerned about the risks of pollution.* Each student is given a card with their role described. For example, there are two representatives from the company, concerned parents, a doctor, unemployed workers and so on. The learners are given time to prepare what they want to say and then they perform the role play. The teacher monitors and only becomes involved if communication breaks down. Feedback is given after the role play.

3. Managing a conversation. Teach and practice expression such as:

So, do you mean that…?

I didn't understand the last thing you said.

Could you speak a little slower, please? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Sorry, you go first.

This enables learners to manage conversations more effectively.

4. Moving discussion. The teacher organizes the room so that there are two concentric circles. The learners sit facing each other. The teacher writes three topics on the board such as: *Blood sports should be banned. Why I love my country. Tourism is nearly always a bad thing.* The learners work in pairs (with the person they are facing) and must choose one of the topics which they then discuss for three minutes. The teacher then stops the activity and writes two or three more topics on the board. All the learners in the outer circle move around one place and with their new partner decide on which topic they want to talk about – and again they have three minutes in which to do so. The activity continues until all the learners in the outer circle have spoken to all the learners in the inner circle. The teacher then conducts a feedback session, including some correction of errors.

5. Survey. Set up a mingling activity whereby learners briefly interview other members of the class. They could find out information such as what people had for breakfast, how they travel to school or favourite pastimes. After the survey, results can be reported back.

6. Telling stories. Ask learners to prepare stories in small groups. These could be based on a particular genre (a ghost story, for example), or set of vocabulary, or some pictures. Allow time for the learners to prepare, and then ask them to tell their stories to other learners.

7. Solving problems. Set up a problem-solving activity, for example, a survival game in which learners must work together to develop a survival strategy. Ask learners to imagine that the light aircraft they have been travelling in has been forced to make an emergency landing. There are items in the plane that they can take and they must put them in order of usefulness. The items include such things as water, a box of matches, a gun and so on. The learners think for a couple of minutes about what they think is important and then work in groups to discuss their strategy and the potential value of each item. The teacher

monitors the activity and later invites each group to report on their decisions before conducting feedback.

8. Information gaps. Set up an activity in which each learner has some information, but not all the information required. For example, the learners plan a trip to New York and each member of the group has different information about places to stay. They must share their information so that together they can decide on the most suitable accommodation.

9. Keep talking. The class is divided into teams. Each learner is given a different topic and must try to speak for 60 seconds on that topic without excessive hesitation. If they are successful, they score a point for their team. If they only manage to speak for a part of the time, a member of the other team has to speak for the remainder of the time to score a point.

10. Ask me my questions. Learners each write three questions that they themselves would like to answer about their lives. They then give the questions to another learner, who uses them as a basis of an interview [8].

It is worth reiterating that in all of the activities described here, speaking combines with other skills, principally listening. In the previous section we looked at how preparation time can be beneficial to learners. Some of these activities, such as *Sentence stem* and *Alibi* have preparation time built into them and in other cases it can be added. As well as allowing preparation time, repeating tasks can also be very beneficial [10]. Again, research suggests that repeating the same task with different partners can also help to improve the accuracy, fluency and complexity of the language used. Many of these activities would lend themselves to this, with learners doing essentially the same task with different partners [13].

Both teachers and learners often see grammar and speaking lessons as being completely separate entities, but we can see from these examples that this is very far from the case. All speaking activities will involve the learners using the grammar and vocabulary that they already know. The feedback given on activities allows teachers to work on this grammar development, providing not just correction, but also new bits of language that seem useful and appropriate.

Bearing in mind this dichotomy ("knowledge" vs. "skill") is preeminent for the FL teacher given that the effective deployment of each one demands a different proper pedagogy. If we are to really create the conditions for speaking to emerge in class, we will have to help our students by 1) providing them with the required knowledge, plus 2) offering manifold opportunities in class in which they they could rehearse and imitate certain features of the skill so as to develop it successfully [1].

The fact that especially at high levels, speaking is somehow elusive and transient – we have stated before that it is spontaneous and, as such, almost impossible to anticipate – makes it very difficult to reduce it automatically to pre-established patterns. Learners could more or less straightforwardly be instructed on knowledge about the target language, but what is the ideal practice to offer to them in each case so that they develop the required skill to speak naturally?

How should speaking activities be sequenced? What are the criteria to apply in order to determine the degree of difficulty that each activity poses? These, and other questions alike, lead to a certain kind of uncertainty on the teacher's side which means an important drawback for its teaching because teachers could easily wonder whether it is worthwhile to invest class time in such a comprehensive and complex task, or even hesitate whether there is something they can realistically do to teach speaking successfully [13]. The challenge that teachers face when teaching speaking – especially at high levels, – is that the lesson becomes less predictable than the comforting series of steps that more controlled activities at lower levels may bring about.

There are specific difficulties students have to cope with and overcome when attempting to speak through a language which is not their L1:

1. We should underline that FL speaking is far more difficult for students than speaking in their L1. This is mainly due to the gaps and even obstacles that might arise: "Our students can communicate their ideas and emotions using their L1 with fluency, maturity and certain depth of thinking, but in English they have serious limitations and lack of language".

2. Without positive feedback, learners will hardly make headway in speaking, because: "students often underestimate their oral ability". Learning speaking should become an altogether positive experience and the teacher's support and guidance becomes essential.

3. Another remarkable constraint is the inhibition that public speaking often causes. This could make students reticent to speak: "learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts".

4. The atmosphere of the class may not be welcoming but one that invites not to utter a single word. We can't overlook that creating a certain mood in the class environment is absolutely important. In this sense, a friendly, lively and relaxed atmosphere will bring about a pleasant sort of group feeling that will make things easier for students. After all: "Speaking is not something that everyone does with ease. It becomes impossible, even for the most extrovert person, if the atmosphere in the group is hostile and the learner concerned is afraid of being ridiculed or mocked" . Students must feel secure so as to decide that they want to speak in class.

5. Sometimes the students' reticence to speak is based simply in their lack of interest in what is happening in class. If the students perceive class activities as irrelevant they lose their motivation. This has a terribly negative impact on their process of learning as learners might stop getting dynamically involved in class.

6. Because of the shortage of time to articulate message, teachers should help learners by making them fully aware of the importance of resorting to whatever language they already know [14, 12]. The aim is to be understood. That is why the activities provided should foster the deployment of the most adequate strategies to fill potential gaps that might stop the communication

process. Although there is no magic formula that will make our students speak the target language straightforwardly and without conscious effort. However, learning to speak in an L2 should by no means be regarded as an insurmountable task. With the passage of time and accumulated experience, learners will become more competent, thus progressively needing to rely less and less on strategies – though even proficient speakers occasionally may find them useful and make use of them.

By creating a supportive atmosphere with lots of conversational tasks we teachers are giving learners the tools they need to find out those behaviours, strategies and attitudes that lead to better results in their performance. We are acting as instructors, time managers, supporters and facilitators. Teachers should keep in mind the need of making students aware of the importance of investing time and valuable effort in creating their own meaningful oral messages [7].

It's also the teacher's responsibility to present learners with a vast array of high quality learning materials. By doing so, students can learn the language by making use of their knowledge of the target language flexibly to get their meaning across when using it in communicative exchanges. Expressing oneself intelligibly and being able to communicate what one really means is an essential goal of speaking. In this sense, teachers must pay due care to recreating situations so that students can rehearse speaking under realistic conditions, "time" being a factor of special consideration.

Despite the learner's active involvement being regarded as the most determining factor in developing the skill, in fact the teacher is the virtual ultimate responsible for the students' eventual degree of achievement. No doubt the learners must be aware that their attitude (either positive or negative) will bring them the results that they realistically invest for. Also it is equally true that being shy, utterly inhibited to interact or reluctant to get actively involved in the interactions and situations recreated in class is certainly not a good asset for attaining high levels of language acquisition. So the student's own contribution for their own progress has remarkable implications. Notwithstanding this, the teacher deserves major consideration in the students' ultimate success when coping with communicative situations in the target language because a good teaching practice is not only that which provides learners with manifold activities, pedagogically well-designed and sequenced, but also that one which conveys (either tacitly or explicitly) to students everything concerning attitudes leading to better results in learning plus triggering strategies [6].

It is also of extraordinary importance the comprehensible enterprise that the teacher may carry out on the occasions in which she/he analyses her/his students' needs and wants and adapts the materials that appear in the textbook. By changing what is not appropriate for his/her students the teacher contributes in maximising the learning potential of each activity and task. The well-informed and reflective practitioner becomes the ideal agent for mediating between the materials and the learner, and for contributing to a more successful second language acquisition. The role of teachers as mediators is overwhelmingly

outstanding [3].

Dealing now with how teachers should react when students make mistakes during their communicative output, it is of uppermost significance to bear in mind the students' level of inter-language development and the main focus of the activity – is it accuracy or fluency – aimed?

Consequently, some premises will constitute the basis upon which we will plan ahead our lessons and some guidelines must be followed in order to agree to with a rationale that may eventually bring about successful speaking.

In general, the pattern to comply with for an oral syllabus at its most basic form should be constituted by the following elements:

Presentation → Practice → Semi-guided tasks → Open interaction

This is a model which can be valued in its potential to offer the learners a way to gain confidence progressively in reproducing, imitating or manipulating certain chunks of language – those language items which are given to the students as models – before passing on to new and more complex tasks, entailing the simultaneous putting into practice of several of the manifold sub-skills that constitute the macro-skill of speaking [2].

First of all, presenting meaningful language and providing comprehensible input is, not only something of uppermost relevance because students need models to learn from, but simply a requisite to trigger language acquisition. Without it, without the proper provision of language in use, students would never start noticing how the language in question works. In other words, learning would by no means be prompted at all. Once the language has been effectively presented, now it is time for students to start accumulating practice in using it. This kind of rehearsal will not be very original or motivating in itself – given that students are not asked to say what they may want to say, but what they are required to say, they are not expected to produce, but to reproduce – but it is vital in order to start fixing certain chunks of language in their minds. Memorization, then, is essential at the very beginning of speaking. If learners are to become eventually fluent in the L2, not having to resort to their L1, but thinking directly in the target language, they must be given this sort of practice which, once accumulated will bring about a more successful communicative output.

As the final stage in this chain of tasks and activities, the speaking class should equally comprehend multiple and assorted activities in which learners have to improvise what they mean and want to say: these are basically exercises in which students interact in a quite free and open way. We teachers should include in this phase those exercises which have an essentially communicative, not merely linguistic, aim. They may range from unscripted role-plays, to simulations, problem-solving tasks, decision-taking activities, drama exercises, discussions, debates or group work, among others. It is the phase in which the student will show her/his creativity to the maximum [8].

Consequently, bearing all the issues we have discussing so far in mind, we can conclude that the teacher's role in the oral class is absolutely important. As with every other aspect of our teaching, successful and effective performance

aimed at making students deploy EFL speaking will depend more on our own belief and attitude than on the training we have previously had. If we perceive the teaching of speaking as an insurmountable task, then we'll do almost nothing to help learners develop this skill. Deploying EFL speaking, though demanding, is neither unfeasible nor unattainable. It does require guidance and support on the part of the teacher, and accumulated time and systematic practice on the students' side. That is why in spite of its complexity "teachers should not cease in their attempts to bring about speaking in students: it is always in the hands of the teacher to decide whether to include speaking as an ordinary constituent of classes or not". Only when oral practice plays a role regularly in our lessons will learners steadily become competent at the productive skill of speaking. Teachers can contribute significantly to turn mere students of English, with a vast knowledge of grammar and structures, into ordinary users of English as a true means of communication.

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КОБИЛЯНСЬКА І. В. Усна комунікація на уроках іноземної англійської мови у вищих навчальних закладах.

У статті розглядаються питання, пов'язані з навчанням навичок говоріння на уроках іноземної англійської мови, зосереджуючись, зокрема на розробці матеріалів, що використовуються для усного мовлення. Викладачі другої мови несуть відповідальність за забезпечення студентів високоякісними навчальними матеріалами, адаптацію мовних матеріалів у підручниках для того, щоб допомогти їм розвинути навички усного мовлення. Таким чином, матеріали, що використовуються в класах іноземної англійської мови, повинні бути адаптовані до індивідуальних характеристик учнів. Тому, було б доцільно проаналізувати навчальний потенціал продуктивності діяльності усного мовлення, беручи до уваги ступінь складності кожного завдання. Отже, важливо дослідити шляхи максимально ефективного виконання усних завдань на уроках іноземної англійської мови.

Такі концепції викладання, як: зрозуміла подача інформації, повторення, запам'ятовування, мовлення, вимова, точність, вільне володіння, взаємодія, робота в парі,

обговорення, віддача або самовиправлення, серед яких: ведення бесіди, рольова гра, висловлювання, обговорення, опитування, оповідання, вирішення проблем, продовження розмови, пробіли для інформації, запитай мене моє запитання. Всі вони тісно пов'язані з розвитком розмовної мови, тому передбачається, що кожен викладач достатньо ознайомлений з ними.

Ключові слова: говоріння, викладання, англійська мова, комунікація.

Кобылянская И. В. Устная коммуникация на уроках иностранного английского языка в высших учебных заведениях.

В статье рассматриваются вопросы, связанные с обучением навыков говорения на уроках иностранного английского языка, сосредотачиваясь, в частности на разработке материалов, используемых для устной речи. Преподаватели второго языка несут ответственность за обеспечение студентов высококачественными учебными материалами, адаптацию языковых материалов в учебниках для того, чтобы помочь им развить навыки устной речи. Таким образом, материалы, используемые на уроках иностранного английского языка, должны быть адаптированы к индивидуальным характеристикам учеников. Поэтому было бы целесообразно проанализировать учебный потенциал продуктивности деятельности устной речи, учитывая степень сложности каждого задания. Поэтому важно исследовать пути максимально эффективного выполнения устных заданий на уроках иностранного английского языка. Такие концепции преподавания как: доступная подача информации, повторение, запоминание, речь, произношение, точность, свободность, взаимодействие, работа в паре, обсуждение, отдача или самоисправление, среди которых, следующие: ведение беседы, ролевая игра, высказывание, обсуждение, опрос, рассказ, решение проблем, продолжение разговора, пробелы для информации, спроси меня мой вопрос. Все они тесно связаны с развитием разговорной речи, поэтому предполагается, что каждый преподаватель достаточно знаком с ними.

Ключевые слова: говорение, преподавания, английский язык, коммуникация.