

Lecture 6: II-Teaching the Four Language Skills

4-Teaching the Speaking Skill

Introduction

Speaking is a productive skill through which we express ideas and thoughts for communicative purposes. We can vary intonation and stress in order to show which part of what we are saying is actually important. We are also able to speed up or slow down or rephrase what we are saying, and we can use facial expressions and body gestures to clarify meaning. However, it does not need the same degree of accuracy as in writing. As speaking is difficult for second/foreign language learners, there has always been a search for effective methods to teach it. The goal of teaching the speaking skill is communicative efficiency.

1. Definition of Speaking

Speaking is an interactive process of making meaning that includes producing, receiving, and processing information. It is regarded as combining sounds systematically to form meaningful sentences (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). It is “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (Chaney & Burk, 1998, p. 13).

2. Fluency versus Accuracy in Speaking

Speaking fluency is the ability to produce the spoken language “without undue pausing or hesitation” (Skehan, 1996, p. 22). It is to speak understandably and not break down communication (Hughes, 2002). However, accuracy in speaking is “the extent to which the language produced conforms to target language norms” (Yuans & Ellis, 2003, p. 2), which involves correct pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

3. Functions of Speaking

3.1. The Interactional Function

It serves to establish and maintain social relations through conversation as it is considered as a primarily social function.

3.2. The Transactional Function

The central focus is on making oneself understood clearly and accurately (giving and receiving information/message). For example, checking into a hotel or ordering food in a restaurant.

3.3. Performance Function

It includes public talks or speaking before an audience, for example 'welcome speech' by a university president, giving a class report about a school trip (Brown & Yule, 1983).

4. Teaching Speaking

Many approaches to teaching speaking has proved to be effective. For example, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in EFL classes, students will have the opportunity of interacting with each other in the target language. In brief, EFL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task. In Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) or Task-based Instruction (TBI), the focus of the lesson is on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. These tasks can include visiting a doctor, meeting friends for a coffee, solving a problem of some sort. Feedback for these types of speaking lessons is based on task completion rather than on accuracy. For example, did the learner communicate successfully with customer services? TBLT is popular for developing fluency with key language features or vocabulary and building student confidence. The following section discusses how speaking functions are taught:

4.1. Teaching Talk as Interaction

Interactional talk is perhaps the most difficult skill to teach since it is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be controlled. It can be taught through naturalistic dialogues in which we discuss opening and closing conversations, making small talk, reporting personal incidents and experiences, and reacting to what others say.

The teacher gives students feedback (back channelling) and encourages them to practice feedback expressions like ‘that’s interesting’, ‘yeah’, ‘really’ by using dialogues.

4.2. Teaching Talk as Transaction

Transactional talk can be easily planned and taught, teachers can rely on information-gap activities and role plays to practice giving and obtaining information especially real-world transactions.

4.1. Teaching Talk as Performance

The teacher can provide examples of speeches, oral presentations, stories etc. through audio or video recordings or written examples. Then, they are analysed or ‘deconstructed’ in order to understand their linguistic and organisational features. Finally, students work jointly on planning their own texts which will be presented to the class.

5. Teaching Pronunciation

In Algeria, students are concerned with Received Pronunciation (RP), which is the usual accent of British English given in books about English, spoken by a small minority in England (Cook, 2008, p. 78).

Repetition of words and phrases is very influential in mastering pronunciation. Of course, repetition may not be helpful without feedback. Students’ consciousness should be raised about phonetics and phonology so that they become able to discriminate between sounds. At advanced levels, students are sometimes helped by looking at phonetic transcripts of spoken language using IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) or by making transcripts of speech themselves.

6. Analytic Approach to Develop the Speaking Skill

The Speaking skill can be developed by focusing on enhancing the following sub-skills:

1-Organic basis of skills (articulation basis): from sound formation to accurate respiration.

2-Rapid speech: to achieve fluent speech at the required speed.

3-Parts of speech, tenses, sequence of tenses, word order and other grammatical rules: for a speaker it is necessary to have language competence including the categories mentioned above

4-Collocations: a competent speaker has to be aware of the collocations used in the target language

e.g. expect a baby, wait for the bus.

5-Stress, intonation, rhythm: belong to the pronunciation close to that of native speakers language learners are supposed to acquire, native like pronunciation which makes their speaking comprehensible

6-Speech functions: students are expected to be aware of language patterns used in various communicative situations such as greetings, introduction, inviting guests, finding the way, etc.

7-Gestures, non-verbal means: in addition to verbal communication a person who wants to communicate, is supposed to use non-verbal means as well such as gestures, facial expressions, etc.

8-Compensation strategies: while focusing on developing speaking skills teachers are expected to prepare students for compensating their lack of knowledge in the act of speech, for example, using synonyms, antonyms, etc.

9-Cohesion, coherence: if the speaker wants to deliver a speech, an oral presentation, he is expected to connect the sentences and the paragraphs to make the text cohesive. (Sárosdy et al., 2006, pp. 57-58).

7. Stages of a Speaking Lesson

1-Pre-speaking (planning and organising): teachers prepare learners for the final speaking task. The pre-stages often include some kind of reading or listening.

2-While-speaking: it is the speaking task itself. It allows learners to actually practice speaking (or a specific feature of speaking).

3-Post-speaking: allows learners to get feedback on their performance and conclusion to the task. This often includes some reading or writing as well.

8. Activities Used to Teach the Speaking Skill

1-Questions-answers: students are expected to spot the differences between two pictures.

2-Picture cues: can be used to make students describe pictures and drawings, they can be asked to sequence pictures in chronological order etc.

3-Role play (acting out): repeating the words of certain characters in a story while role play means to add something new, individual to the words of the characters in the story.

4-Miming: gives a prompt for the students to talk.

5-Simulation: is a problem-solving activity in which several students can take part.

6-Memory games: are very important for developing students' thinking skills as well as their proficiency in English.

7-Jigsaw tasks (e.g. puzzles).

8-Interviews: students can make interviews with the author of a story or the with the main character of the story, etc

9-For and Against (debates): students can be prepared for arguing for and against something.

10-Projects: certain projects must be given to groups of students so that they can learn how to plan a city for example, or how to make an itinerary of a journey etc.; during these activities they will learn how to share responsibilities and how to cooperate with each other.

11-Monologues (with special focus on unity, cohesion, coherence) to develop discourse competence : can be a welcome speech or a speech of a politician to encourage people to vote for him, etc. (Sárosdy et al., 2006, p. 59).

9. The Advantage of Teaching Speaking

- To build up confidence among the learners.
- To develop critical thinking and reasoning among the learners.
- To express their views freely and independently.
- To present papers in conferences and seminars.
- To participate in group discussions and debates.
- To share ideas in collaborative learning.
- To continue their further studies in international universities.
- To develop their both vocabulary items and grammatical structures.
- To understand various traditions and cultures of the people around the world.

Conclusion

The challenge for teachers and materials developers is to find strategies that help learners develop fluency, accuracy, as well as appropriateness of language use. The main aim behind teaching speaking is to help learners move behind the level of linguistic competence to achieve communicative competence.

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