TEACHING AND IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILL

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WHAT IS SPEAKING?

Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). 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, therefore, recent pedagogical research on teaching students conversation has provided some parameters for developing objectives and techniques.
Teaching Speaking

Speaking English is the main goal of many adult learners. Their personalities play a large role in determining how quickly and how correctly they will accomplish this goal. Those who are risk-takers, unafraid of making mistakes will generally be more talkative, but with many errors that could become hard to break habits. Conservative, shy students may take a long time to speak confidently, but when they do, their English often contains fewer errors and they will be proud of their English ability. It's a matter of quantity vs. quality, and neither approach is wrong so how shall we prioritize the two clearly important speaker goals of accurate (clear, articulate, grammatically and phonologically correct) language and fluent (flowing, natural) language? However, if the aim of speaking is communication and that does not require perfect English, then it makes sense to encourage quantity in your classroom. Break the silence and get students communicating with whatever English they can use, correct or not, , and selectively address errors.
Speaking lessons often tie in pronunciation and grammar which are necessary for effective oral communication. Or a grammar or reading lesson may incorporate a speaking activity. Either way, your students will need some preparation before the speaking task. This includes introducing the topic and providing a model of the speech they are to produce. A model may not apply to discussion-type activities, in which case students will need clear and specific instructions about the task to be accomplished. Then the students will practice with the actual speaking activity.
These activities may include imitating (repeating), answering verbal cues, interactive conversation, or an oral presentation.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind as you plan your speaking activities.
As much as possible, the content should be practical and usable in real-life situations. Avoid too much new vocabulary or grammar, and focus on speaking with the language the students have.
Correcting Errors

You need to provide appropriate feedback and correction, but don't interrupt the flow of communication. Take notes while pairs or groups are talking and address problems to the class after the activity without embarrassing the student who made the error. You can write the error on the board and ask who can correct it.
Address both interactive fluency and accuracy, striving foremost for communication. Get to know each learner's personality and encourage the quieter ones to take more risks.
Conversation Strategies

Encourage strategies like asking for clarification, paraphrasing, gestures, and initiating ('hey,' 'so,' 'by the way').
Teacher Intervention

If a speaking activity loses steam, you may need to jump into a role-play, ask more discussion questions, clarify your instructions, or stop an activity that is too difficult or boring.
How To Teach Speaking

Now many linguistics and ESL teachers agree on that students learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. In brief, ESL 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.
Activities To Promote Speaking

- Discussion
- Role Play
- Simulation
- Information Gap
- Brainstorming
- Storytelling
- Interviews
- Story Completion
- Picture Narrating
- Picture Describing
- Find the Difference
Discussions

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like “people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel”. Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way. This activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The group members can be either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas.
Teachers can come out with interesting, authentic and essential topics that students can discuss or talk about especially in the target language. The related topics should be easy and understandable. As a start ESL teachers can relate the topics with students' interests before moving to serious topics like national issues or the world politics. Lastly, in class or group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express support, check for clarification, and so on.
Role Play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are Ali, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and what they think or feel."
Simulations

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she or he brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.
In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.
## Information-gap activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A’s Information</th>
<th>Person’s name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Weekends</th>
<th>Movies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah (female)</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Romance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Go fishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaled (male)</td>
<td>Amman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aqaba</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td></td>
<td>Play cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal (female)</td>
<td>Irbed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B’s Information</th>
<th>Person’s name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Weekends</th>
<th>Movies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relax at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali (male)</td>
<td>Kerak</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Play football</td>
<td>Horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leen (female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Read novels</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The objective is for students to ask questions to find out what they can from the other(s).

- Sample Questions:
  What is the first person's name?
  How do you spell it?
  Where is he/she from?
  What is his/her occupation
  What does he/she do on weekends?
  What kind of movies does he/she like?

- After completing the chart, students discuss with their partners: Which person would each like as a friend? Why?
Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.
Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Storytelling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening.
Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.
Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.
This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.
Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.
Find the Difference

For this activity students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in the pictures.
Conclusion

Speaking is the key to communication. By considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners to improve their speaking and overall oral competency.
Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed before can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.
Thank you!
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